

One of the great life changing events for anyone who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered is that marvelous moment when you "Come out."

For me, the story of Lazarus has always had great meaning. There is something about coming from death to life that is everwhelmingly life changing.

You know the story. Jesus is teaching & healing across the Jordan River in the region where John^B first began his ministry when word comes to him that his friend Lazarus was near death. Lazarus lived w/ his two sisters Mary & Martha. Bethany was only two miles from Jerusalem & Jesus had already experienced persecution in that area. His disciples cautioned him against going back there. This didn't deter Jesus, though he did leave where he was a few

deep longer. He seemed to know something about Lazarus' condition that others did not know. He explained, "This sickness will not end in death no, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified thru it."

Finally, it was time to go. The disciples were still apprehensive but Jesus knew where he needed to be - with those he loved.

Jesus never forsakes those he loves - even tho' he leads us thru some strange paths & often keeps us waiting.

When Martha saw Jesus, she fell down at his feet. "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." Jesus was deeply moved. He asked, "Where have you put him?" They said "Lord, come & see." Then we have the shortest, but perhaps one of

when we are terrified of telling
those we love who we are?

the most powerful verses in
the Bible - "Jesus wept!"

The Sovereign of all creation
wept when told of the death
of a friend. Jesus wept. How
many of us have forgotten that
Jesus - and Jeremiah's God - can
weep for us - when we are
facing death, when we are
straying - when we are lost *
remember Jesus weeping! And
those who were watching
said "See how he loved him."
But others grumbled. "Couldn't
this man, who opened the eyes
of the blind, have kept this
man alive?" They didn't know
that Jesus ~~was~~ was setting the
scene for a miracle - a real
miracle - a once in a lifetime
physical manifestation of the
power & promise of God.

When Jesus came to the tomb
which was in a cave, he spoke

these words "Take away the stone" ~~by that time the~~ Martha protested "By this time the body has decayed. Good practical Martha. The Church is full of her. ^{May we} we believe that X has the power to move heaven or earth, but let someone in the church say let's do something that hasn't been done before and someone is sure to protest "we can't do that."

Maybe the reason Jesus was crying that day wasn't only his love for Lazarus but also his despair over the lack of faith on the part of people who say they believe in God.

Jesus said to her, "Didn't I say that if you would only believe that you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus said a prayer of thanksgiving and then

we are all bound up, scared &
Jesus says: Untie him & let
them go!

said in a loud voice, "Lazarus
come ~~forth~~^{out}" And the one who
was dead came forth bound
hand & foot in grave clothes &
his face was bound in a napkin
& Jesus said "Loose him & let
him go." X

What's it like to cross the
river of death & be called back.
Surely, Lazarus was never
the same afterwards. We assume
that he was happy to be
resuscitated. Maybe he resented
being called back. Maybe he
~~just~~ preferred living in the
hereafter. Maybe we'd rather stay in
the closet. It's safe there.

I wonder if Lazarus from
time to time would walk
outside Bethany to the cave
where he once lay dead for
4 days. I wonder if he
didn't shake his head in
doubt as to where they
might be today if X had

me "touched their lives. Many
of us have had addictions to
alcohol & drugs but X said, "Roll
away the stone. Some of us were
literally dead but X brought
us back to life. X said "Roll
away the stone." X wants to
give life to you - new life -
and many of us have experienced
that new life. We're life the
grace of the cloth for new life.

~~Jesus once said~~ "Feed my sheep"

There were no conditions

heart of all "Feed my sheep
if they deserve it"

Feed my sheep if you feel like it.

Feed my sheep if you have any
leftovers

Feed my sheep if the word
strikes you.

If you have the wealth
if you're not too busy
No conditions - yes feed my sheep
Could or be that God's Kingdom
will come when each
lamb is fed?

We who have been called
to keep covenant are called
to feed sheep —

Even when it means
the grazing will be done
on our own lawns —
or in our churches.

~~Amen~~

When we're out — we need to
reach out, & help someone else
out of their closet, because
the closet is a grave?
Amen

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Date: 2/25/01

Sermon: Transfigured - Dedicated

Reference Text: Exodus 34: 29-35
II Corinthians 3: 12-18
Luke 9: ~~28-45~~ 36

Hymns — Immortal, Inexpressible 1-3-25
Sunshine in my Soul 499

Today, in the Xtian calendar, we are at Transfiguration Sunday — which, if you're like most of us coming into MCC from Baptist or Pentecostal tradition means almost nothing. But if you're from one of the liturgical church traditions it's one of the festive "white" Sundays — meaning that it's a special day. Why special? Because it was special in Jesus' life.

We've been in a season called Epiphany — which celebrated everything in Jesus' life from the visit of the Magi to this special event — all of the early ministry — the calling of the disciples — the feeding of 5000, the wedding at Cana. But now the mood changes. Wednesday is Ash Wednesday — the beginning of Lent — Tuesday is Mardi Gras

the last fling before some Christians
settle down to the seriousness of the
march - the inexorable march - toward
the cross. Today is the hinge on
which that change takes place.
Jesus is Transfigured.

There was a tradition in ~~early~~ the
days before Jesus came that when the
Messiah came, he would be a leader
like Moses, a prophet like Elijah &
a King like David. So our OT reading
reminds us why Moses was so important.

The Law held a special place in
the life of the Jews. If one was faithful
to the law - one was faithful to God.

We now know differently - anyone can
slavishly follow a legalistic religion
and be a hate-filled person - very
ungodly - but they didn't see it that
way. If you loved God's law - you
loved God who gave the law.

the OT reading tells us that "the
skin of Moses' face shone because
he had been talking to God."

We talk about "Mountain Top Experiences." These scriptures are where that expression come from. Moses goes up a mountain to talk to God + to receive the Law. Jesus + his two closest disciples go up a mountain + Jesus has a very special encounter to God.

Epiphany - the season we are closing is called that because a special manifestation of God (or a very special insight) is called an Epiphany, a ^{radically} new way of looking at something. Moses had an epiphany - he saw God and received the Law - a whole new life for the rag tag followers he had brought from Egypt. Jesus had an epiphany - an encounter to God and it was to change his life. He was to go from itinerant preacher to Savior of the world. On this transfiguration Sunday, some of us - hopefully - will have an

encounter $\pm$ God and will change
the course of our lives.

If you have been following
the local B'ham news, a group
of men are climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro
the highest mt. in Africa. People
have pledged money for a good
cause for each mile they have
climbed + they will raise a great
deal of money by this climb.

It's a worthy cause - but climbing
a mt. like Kilimanjaro or Everest
also changes a person. They will never
again be who they were. Some
experiences change us - we will
never be the same person we
were before.

Have you ever been really -
deeply in love? You long for that
person, anticipate his or her arrival.
Clean house, prepare a special
meal or a ^{special} place is
planned. And then the precious
moment arrives + there is such
a sense of completeness -
wholeness because he or she is

there. It's not just a chance encounter - it's a special time.

The climb to the top of a mt. is similar. You plan in advance - very carefully - your life depends on every detail. Arriving means a mixture of collapse from the effort & strain and the breath-taking view of the world from the top of a mountain. Scripturally, mountaintops have meant encounters w/ God. Frightening (how would you feel face to face with one as awesome as God?), correcting (woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips - Isaiah) and empowering (there am I - send me).

Jesus has come to this place in daily walks of faith & obedience. His invitation to the disciples meant that they too have the view of the mountain top, but take on new responsibilities of trust as well.

but it's not like that. M L K Jr spoke to us about having been to the Mountaintop & had a vision of a future we still haven't arrived at - but remember it was followed by his tooed return to martyrdom in the valley - but he KNEW why he was there when he returned.

"hasten to my beloved son" says the voice of God. Don't isolate yourself. Remove the obstacles that keep you from listening to Jesus.

The high moments of our lives continue to leave us with simple symbols that recall them. We find a pressed flower in our bibles and remember a sweet occasion. We pull out an old playbill at church program & we remember a wonderful occasion. Someone in the family tells an old story or mentions a special place.

and everyone laughs; we remember our sense of belonging. The symbols of our faith - the rituals of the church have that some power to sustain us. The cross, the ~~Lord's~~ prayers, communion can be points of reliving the mountaintop of being in God's presence, but only if we have been there + come down. Don't let your memories of the mountaintop be frozen steel memories - let them empower you to come down and put your faith to work.

I want to add one small detail. Moses + Elijah were on the mountain - but Jesus took two disciples to him. Jesus seldom tried to do things alone. He had 12 disciples. He was particularly close to Peter + John. There was the disciple Jesus loved. There was his family of choice. Those

in ministry who try to go it alone either fail or become autocrats + their followers fail. But Jesus believed in Cooperation. Today, we will dedicate this year's faithful board members + workers to their tasks. Jesus sent his workers out empty handed - with only a working stick + a companion by their side.

Renee + you are such companions. All they had was who they were + what they had to give. Jesus saw to it that at least two of them had had a mountaintop exp. It was now just of who they were. Who are you? What do you have to give? Everyone of us has a divine spark. It is who we are. What do we have to give. All we are, what we know, what we can learn, who we can become. Alone we can do only a

little. Multiplied we can do much.

Someone once said the reason mt climbers tie themselves together is to keep the sane ones from ~~turning back~~ going home.

Sometimes it's good to be tied to people who are the right kind of crazy — who think they can be a very special church in a place like Gadsden.

Today, we tie you together with Kenne & we become the consecrated leaders of this church. I hope you will have mountaintop experiences to sustain you — & allow yourself to dedicate yourself to your work in the valley.

The prayers, the congregation & the communion are there to sustain you. Use them, learn to love them & you will not walk the valley alone.

little. Must-phys are can also
much.

Someone ever said the
reason we churches the
themselves together is to
keep the door open for
~~the~~ the young have.
Someone is good to be
that to people who are the
right kind of group - who
think they can be a very
special church in a place
like this.

Today, we are together
with these & our leaders
the concentrated leaders of
this church. I hope you will
have some interesting experiences
to maintain you - a school
yourself to educate yourself
to your work in the field.

the group, the congregation & the
community are there to sustain
you, love them, learn to love them
& you will have the opportunity
to work.

Reconciliation

Before I get started preaching, I would like to recognize some old friends. First, Vivian Gilliam, who has been a constant member here for the whole 16 years of this church's life. I believe Vivian was our first church clerk. Secondly, I want to thank someone who made my life as pastor a real joy in the founding days of this church. Tom Rose. Tom taught me something about taking an offering that I pass on to you. Tom never asked for money. He always told the congregation a meaningful parable, story, anecdote, or piece of wisdom he had picked up and then he passed the plate — and you know something, we never wanted for money in those early days when he was our treasurer. I treasure him.

Last week
I was in Mobile

I'm glad to be here. I'm always glad to be here in Mobile. It's always like coming home. I'm a person with many homes. Originally N.Y. then for many years N.C. and now Birmingham, but I treasure Mobile because I bought my first house here and have mourned leaving that house many, many times. You can give a home - just like you do people, I have learned.

* Our sermon is a little bit about a boy who grieved his home. Just a side note - have you ever wondered where that boy's mother was? I often think about Abraham & Isaac trudging up a mountain to Isaac's almost certain death and wonder where Sarah was - home tearing her hair out because of what this crazy man her husband was doing

with the child of their old age.
I cannot - will not - imagine
her passively allowing Abraham
to kill their only child without
relying on God. And the Hebrews
were very good at relying on
God.

Our sermon is about reconciliation

An ad on TV began with the stirring
question "Wouldn't you love an
exciting new career that could
change your whole life?"

According to this ad, all you needed
to do to have a totally "new"
and "exciting" life would be to
launch a career selling Pre-Paid
Telephone Cards. The ads make it
clear that this career optly requires
no direct sales on your part.
You can be the wholesale distribu-
ter in your area.

Now, many people enjoy talking
on the phone - I'm not one of
them, but many do. And many

of us have family + friends
living far enough away that
we frequently make long
distance calls, so a phone credit
card would be a handy thing -
But I have serious doubts about
the "totally fulfilling + life changing
abilities" of selling phone cards.

I do know something that
will change your life. The
secret is found in Paul's
scripture this morning.

"So if anyone is in X, there is a
new creation: everything old
has passed away; see, everything
has become new! All this is
from God, who reconciled us
to himself thru X, and has given
us a ministry of reconciliation;
that is, in X God was reconciling
to himself, not counting
their trespasses against them, and
entrusting the message of
reconciliation to us. So we

are ambassadors for X, since God is making that appeal thru us; we entreat you on behalf of X, be reconciled to God.

Now — Remember those two boys we read about earlier. There they were working the family farm — hard work, moral discipline, religious tradition shaped their daily lives. The seasons came & went. But just over the hill was another story. Only a long day's walk from the Galilean farmland were the Greek cities of the Decapolis.

see photo

Recently one of those cities was excavated. It was the city of Scythopolis. It boasted magnificent ~~Greek~~ Greek architecture, areas for competitive sports, theaters for dramatizing Greek philosophy & culture, and in the center of town, right across from the

city hall, an ornate brothel
& the parks & their terraces
where many orgies of ~~the~~
self-indulgence were held.

We can imagine that reports of
this lifestyle must have made
the farm boy's work seem like
dead drudgery. Finally he made
a decision. He broke all kinds
of Jewish tradition and asked
his father for his $\frac{1}{3}$ of his father's
money - he would get it when
the red man died - but he wanted
it now. He took the resources
of generations of hard work
and left that world of work,
moral discipline, religious
tradition and love. He moved
into a world of material
affluence & self-indulgence.
The journey wasn't long in
miles, But in terms of
way of life, it was a journey
into a distant country.

we know how the story ends.
Pinniless & hungry - the boy
began to remember the farm &
his Dad — where was his
mother? — and decided to
go home. He was reconciled
to his father. I wonder if he
was ever reconciled to his
brother.

The June 5, 2000 issue of Time
mag. had an interesting set
of articles about teens. There was
a story about a new, illegal drug
- ecstasy - becoming popular in
teens & 20's. Some claim that
ecstasy makes them more peaceful,
joyful, empathic & understanding -
open & honest to others. Of course,
when the high wears, these
benefits go away - and long term
use blows out your serotonin
receptors - probably making
you a candidate for Parkinson's -
but they don't tell you that.

In the same issue - There was

an article on another teen trend - religious revivals. The article focussed on a high school in Miss. Participants reported an outbreak of joy, peace, understanding - openness & honesty. Many of the participants reported exactly the same effects as those attested to in the ecstasy article, only the benefits didn't go away after the revival. In fact, they are expected to continue & increase & spread to others long after the event ended. When we are in X, something real & lasting happens in our lives.

Paul tells us "God was in X, reconciling the world to Godself" & that "God has given us a ministry of reconciliation."

I believe that's what MCO's are all about. Many of us have been the prodigal -

off into
we've taken the word to make
our own way. I ran away
from N.Y. when I was 17 to
N.O. Somehow Mardi Gras & gay
culture in NO were much
more colorful than my family
& the strict moral upbringing
I had at home. I called
home & asked for money to
come home — bus fare, if you
will \$22⁰⁰ in those days & my
Dad — not the Biblical father of
this story — said you get there on
your own — figure out a way
to get home on your own.

Luckily, a wine great uncle — more
father than my own father — bought
me a non-refundable ticket — he
knew me — and meal chits on the
train, & I came home.

Reconciliation — repairing a broken
relationship whether it's God — ~~two~~
two or more people — sometimes
sometimes a broken relationship
requires a reconciliation — some-

times the best thing is to move on & just believe that unhappiness is better life in the past. But when we repair a broken relationship its a little like balancing your checkbook - we identify a problem or mistake, we make an effort to correct it, & we achieve a new balance which allows us to reestablish that relationship.

That's why Jesus told the story of the two boys - Funny isn't it - the bad boy was truly reconciled to his dad - Mr. Goody - goody might never be. Jesus was talking about the Pharisees. Many of them would never truly understand the love of God as deeply as would those who had gone astray. It's all about grace. That's what God has done for us in X. He has allowed us - who were no people to be called the people of God. X has taken people who were

estranged from God + turned
us into God's beloved children.
Now, says Paul, we are to be
X's agents of reconciliation
in the world. It is not an
easy task - but you are doing
it. You are bringing people not
only into a new relationship $\bar{c}$
God but also $\bar{c}$ each other. You
are teaching people what the
D of G ~~off~~ on earth looks like.

It's not an easy task really. It
requires commitment, ~~at~~ it requires
some sacrifices.

It would be nice if we were
like the citizens of Aldous Huxley's
Brave New World. They didn't have
to struggle $\bar{c}$ the questions of life -
they were carefully medicated $\bar{c}$ a
drug called Soma. Huxley wrote
"there's always soma to calm your
anger, to reconcile you to your
enemies, to make you patient +
long suffering. In the past you

have we tried to repair
our relationships c dear parents?

you could accomplish these things
by making great effort + after
years of moral training. Now you
swallow 2-3 half-gram tablets
+ there you are. Anyone can be
virtuous now. You can carry your
morality in a bottle. Xty 5
tears." But it took tears, X's
tears - to reconcile the world to
God + sometimes it takes
tears - our tears of repentance
for us to be reconciled c God
And it takes tears for us to do
~~the~~ the work of X in the world.

Paul says God made it possible
for us to repair our relationship
c others when God took the
initiative to repair our relationship
to him by sending Jesus X. *

Jesus repaired our relationship to
God by suffering the consequences
of our mistakes for us. c JC,
God has settled God's account c
us + now God calls us to settle

our accounts - one another +
to work toward helping all
people to settle their accounts - God.

How many of you use a computer?
Remember white out when we only
had typewriters. You painted this stuff
over your mistake. But there was
a problem - either it didn't cover
your mistake completely or it ~~it~~
left a big blot + when you typed
over there was this big mess on
the paper that said "you made a
mistake" - white out only partially
covered our mistakes.

Now the computer is another story.
You just go back - delete your mistake
and start over. You can remove a
letter, a word, or a whole document.
JC doesn't just cover up our mistakes
he completely deletes them! If - and
it's a big if - if we will let him.
The older brother didn't like the
idea of little brothers mistakes
being blotted out. And there are people
who will tell you you can't beg, &
X'tian. Don't believe them God

does not work selectively. If it works for one - it works for all. Jesus offers us a "complete delete" on our past + only asks that we try better in our relationships w/ God, w/ each other + w/ the best in ourselves.

A little boy was playing ball in the house - a definite no-no. And he broke a vase. He tried everything to glue it together but couldn't + finally left the pieces for his mom to find.

Mom came home "Do you know who broke my vase? It's all here in pieces."

Johnny tried courage but it failed "no mom I don't know."

He creased waiting for her answer "that's funny" she said appearing at his bedroom door "I wanted to know who it was; I've hated that thing for years."

You + I have life lots of broken
pieces lying around. But rather
than being finished, we have
been loved beyond our wildest
imaginings or deserving. Grace.
Because X has come into our
world + given himself on our
behalf.

Jesus puts it this way: "I came
that they may have life + life more
abundantly" Jesus can truly
change our lives - totally - and
this church can be about the
business of changing the lives
of so many in the community.

Share the good news of Cornerstone.
Help yourself + someone else be
reconciled to God thru X. You will
keep on going & going & going
for another 16 and many more
yrs. That
Amen.

You + I have life left of hope
facing these moments. For within
these times, perhaps, we have
been given. Perhaps our greatest
miracles are becoming. (Crisis)
Because X has come into our
world - given himself as our
help.

Jesus goes in this way: I come
that they may have life + life more
abundantly. Jesus can truly
change our lives - to help - and
this church can be about the
business of changing the lives
of its people in the community.
How is it? Not in what we
have the good news of Christianity.
Help yourself + have one who is
ready to go with X. You will
keep on going & going & going
from this is our way. (Crisis)
Let that
be.

Not "Onward Train Soldiers" or
the Parable of the ~~Fig~~ ^{Fig} Tree
while we were at conference,
I noticed that one of the
choruses referred to Christians
as soldiers. I hate that
imagery, just as I hate the
hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

First, you need to realize that
I was raised by a family
that had a long history of being
against bearing arms. My grand-
mother was a member of the
German Baptist Brethren church
which is usually referred to as
"the Dunkers," because they unlike
many German churches - like the
Lutherans, do not practice infant
Baptism. Now, that's not particularly
strange down here where nearly
everyone either is or is related
to a Baptist - but where I'm
from, there aren't too many
Baptists. What made my
grandparents different was their

total objection to bearing arms.

My dad served in WWI — but as an ambulance attendant — because he refused to bear arms. His younger brother served in WWII as a chaplain's assistant & photographer in the Navy — again because he refused to bear arms. I raised my children in a household where we didn't even play w/ guns & I taught them their heritage of being noncombatants — so "Quo vadis Christian Soldiers" hits me in a very peculiar way — it just doesn't resonate well. Besides, I think it is more important to love people into the Dominion of God than it is to fight them & subdue them into God's reign.

I work for one of your hospitals here in Gadodex and I hear a variety of accents & know that the doctors

whose words I hear are
Hispanic Catholics, American
Protestants + Jews, Indian Hindus,
Chinese Buddhists, Arabic Moslems
all working together in the
freedom to practice their own
religions and raise their children
in a land where Xtrans, Jews,
Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists
and atheists are all free to
find God in their own way.
Being an army + forcing them
to worship our God will not
teach them the love of X. I
guess it is one reason people
like Judge Moore scare me, and
the people who insist on public
prayer at school events worry
me. If people are introduced
to Jesus and learn to love him
and want to follow him - that's
my idea of a true conversion exp.
but forcing someone to follow
my God doesn't seem to truly
serve God. Mahatma Gandhi
loved + read the Bible many,

many times and was impressed by Jesus' silence when he was in the hands of his oppressors. When asked if he admired Jesus so much, why he never became a Christian - Gandhi answered "Other Christians."

Today's Gospel is part of a long prayer Jesus prayed for his disciples before he was led away to be crucified. In this part of the prayer Jesus prays for us - the people of the future. First, he prayed for himself as he faced the Cross. Second, he prayed for the disciples & for God's power to keep them - given the oppression they were going to face because of their faith - Now he prays for those who are going to believe because of the bravery & faithfulness of the Christian martyrs. This prayer shows us two characteristics of the X. First we see his complete faith & his

radiant certainty. Can you imagine what it was like - a handful of followers (and one of them a traitor), facing the + his confidence was unshaken + he prayed for the followers who would come in the future - you + me. Then he prayed for the unity of his followers. He had confidence in them. He knew they didn't fully understand him (that's one of the characteristics of the Gospel of John - the disciples never fully understand Jesus + who he is) He knew they were going to abandon him in a few hours when he needed them most - yet he looked to these same followers to spread his way + his name throughout the world. What was Jesus' prayer for us in the future: It was that we would be one. Not because we were forced to be but because of love. We know that Jesus loved God - their relationship was

based totally on the love they had
for one another. Jesus was
obedient to God because of love
not fear. And so he prayed that
we might love each other in the
Christian family the same way God &
Jesus loved each other.

There are all these denominations
in the Christian family — they are
all different in some small way
and they ~~are~~ will never all
believe in exactly the same way.
When people like Gandhi look
at us, they see Christians who believe
their ecclesiastical organization
is the only way, or their creed
is the only creed, their ritual is
the only way to worship. It's
a little like the story of the 3
little pigs.

The first one built his house
of straw, the second of twigs, &
the last of bricks. It always
reminds me of the Christians
whose faith house is built

of a few scraps of scripture usually of condemnation, do's & don'ts, and who feel that their understanding of those scraps of scripture are the only way to be Xian. Then we have the Xians whose faith house is built of a tight net of twigs of tradition. This is the way we have always done it and it is the only right way. You must lift the cup just so & make the sign of the cross just so — because that's the way it has always been.

And then there is the 3rd little pig who built his faith house of bricks — solid rock — the rock of the love of X and our love for one another.

You know — when Satan, the wolf wants to blow down your faith house, a few scraps of scripture or even the whole Bible won't stop him — and all the traditions of the church won't keep your

farm house from being blown away — but your farm will never be destroyed if it is based on your love for God, God's love for you + your love for each other.

~~There's a preacher whose name is late Galloway who is now a faculty member at Astbury Theo Seminary. Dr. Galloway earned that title by building a church of 6500 members in Portland, Or. New Hope Commu. Church.~~

~~Galloway tells the story of a single mom~~

Let me tell you a true story about MCC members loving each other. When I was pastoring at Providence RI, we had a church of 17 Lesbian mothers 3 gay fathers + 45 children among them. Mary Comerford had 7 youngsters from about 4 to 17. She had a fire at her apt. and one of the Church members came to my

house to tell me about it —
Within half an hour 12 ^{dozens} gay
women had gathered at Mary's
and were able to get most of
her furniture, her kids & her
clothing and many of their other
belongings out of the burned out
building - They were filthy & soot
and plaster & water. We stored
them in the parsonage basement
& the following Saturday - the
same bunch took over a
laundromat & sorted & washed
all those kids clothes, bedding,
household linens, washed &
folded & presented them to Mary
at her new apartment.

Meanwhile the Welfare Dept had
taken care of ~~for~~ helping Mary find
a new place & had given her 750⁰⁰
to replace what she had lost in
the fire — now remarkably little
because of her friends' concern &
caring. That Sunday, Mary came
to church & a check for the church of
750⁰⁰ her to the of the welfare check.

have — that's what it's all about

Jesus says "And I have given them the glory which you gave me — that they may be one as we are one. I am in them, & you are in me, so that their unity with us & each other may stand consummated & complete. I pray for this that the world may realize that you sent me & that you loved them as you love me. I have told them what you are like, & I will go on telling them that the love which you loved me may be in them & that I may be in them.

There's a whole community out there that is looking for love — like the old song "looking for love in all the wrong places" they need — not an army, beating them into the church — but a loving, welcoming family of people like them.

loving them into the dominion
of God and teaching them to
love each other to wholeness.
Jesus knew that love was the
only way then - and it still
is. His final word -
"have one another as I
have loved you"

Have a blessed Memorial Day +
thank all those that make the
world safe for freedom - but
let's try to change the world
by loving it - not by force -
I think it was X's way. Amen

leaving them out the door
of God and teaching them to
love each other's weaknesses,
James knew this love was the
only way for - and it still
is. His love was -
"I love one another as I
love myself."

Thomas Merton's Memento Mori
think of those who make the
world suffer for freedom - this
let's try to change the world
by loving it - not by force.
I think it was X's way. James

James was a man who
was not afraid to
suffer for his beliefs
and was a man who
was not afraid to
suffer for his beliefs
and was a man who
was not afraid to
suffer for his beliefs

Date: 6-8-01

Sermon: Language & Revolutionary Pentecost

Reference Text: Acts 2:1-21, Romans 8:14-17

Pentecost was not a X^tian holiday. It was a major Jewish holiday and was very special to the Jews. There were 3 holidays on which every living Jewish male who lived 20 miles from Jerusalem was legally bound to make the trip to Jerusalem - Passover, Pentecost & Tabernacles. Pentecost means 50th, another name was the Festival of Weeks - because it fell on the 50th day - a week of weeks after Passover. By Pentecost, June, travelling conditions in Palestine were at their best - people came from all over the Near East.

The feast had two major significances.

1. It commemorated the giving of the Law to Moses on Sinai.
2. It had an agricultural significance: It celebrated the barley harvest in - gathering. The law laid down that out of 40th for having been given the law, no serious work could be done. It was a holiday &

Jerusalem was filled with a happy -
partying crowd - which hears out
something I have been saying for
years - the D & G is a party !

While there were people of all
nationalities there that weekend -
to speak a foreign language was
unnecessary. One language would
serve you well throughout the known
world in those days - Greek almost
everyone spoke two languages in those
days - their native language & Greek
Most of the Jews spoke Aramaic -
Did you know, for example, that the
difference between Bibles Jewish &
Catholic versions vs. Protestant Bibles
all has to do with a language shift.
The books of the Protestant O.T. stop
when the language shifted from
Aramaic to Greek - we do not
include the OT books not written
in Hebrew while Catholics & Jews
include them.

Language is important. Whoever
is in control of language has
power. Farmers & country people

generally spoke only their native language - the educated classes scholars, rulers, city folk all spoke more than one language. Language is power. Many years ago I did a lot of research on God-language - the words we use to speak about God. Most words ^{or coarse} were male words Father, Prince, King-like words. Very few were women-type words Mother, nursemaid, feeder. I made a promise to myself to find as many other ways to talk about God - words that had nothing to do with power - either male or female - and to talk TO God rather than about God in my prayers. After all - God knows who God is, I don't have to tell God what God already knows.

Language is Revolutionary. The disciples found that out at the Pentecost when the HS became manifest.

"In the last days, it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. Life will be different because sons and daughters will prophesy, young men will have visions & the old will dream dreams" —

the PROPHET
Isaiah updated for a new occasion.

Pentecost not only marked the presence of the H.S. in the spirit of a newly formed people of Faith. it also marked a radical beginning: the face of religion changed even as it maintained the symbols of the old Faith.

Christianity took the symbols — just as it had at Passover taken the flat bread & wine & made them the body & blood of X — now it took the symbol of the giving of the law & replaced it with the giving of the H.S. a radical — even revolutionary — change. From the stultifying effects of the law to the liberation of following the Spirit — and it is a choice that still haunts

people today. Most people want the security of legalism - they want to know what they must do & must not do. They are afraid of the freedom of following where the Spirit leads. Most of us are afraid when we are told "I am not going to tell you how to live. I am going to hand you a Bible and tell you, read & follow where the HS leads you." That, my friend is freedom - and most people are scared to death of that much freedom. It was a revolution & it still is.

Paul says "You did not receive a state whose dominating condition is slavery so that you might relapse into fear; but you received a state whose dominating characteristic is adoption in which we cry "Abba" - Pappa. The Spirit bears witness & our spirit that we are children of God. If we are

God's children then we are
also heirs; & if we are heirs of
God then we are joint-heirs of
Christ, ~~the~~

The Spirit & only the Spirit
bears witness that we are God's
children - NO HUMAN FACTOR -
only the Spirit.

Alfred North Whitehead says that
any lasting revolution will
reverse the sacred symbols of the
past all the while ruthlessly
revising them.

Pentecost is rooted in the Jewish
past - the early Christian past &
rooted in Today as well. There
was a religious revolution going
on in St's & Paul's day - & you
& I are part of a religious
revolution today which says
"I will not be bound by your
law - I will obey the leading
of the H.S. I will ^{ENCOURAGE} men &
women ^{to} prophecy - dream

dreams + see visions, + no
one will tell me otherwise
because th H5 tells me
I can.

old story: A man was
travelling from Indianapolis
to Chicago, Ill. He did not
realize that Indianapolis is on
Eastern Standard Time + Chicago is
on Central Time. He inquired at
the Indianapolis airport abt.
a ticket to Chicago. "The next flight
leaves at 1:00 pm," the ticket agent
stated "and arrives in Chicago at
1:05 pm." "Say that again, please"
the startled traveler asked. "The
next flight leaves Indianapolis at
1:00 pm + arrives in Chicago at 1:05
pm. Do you want a reservation"
"No said the man, "but I think
I'll hang around + watch That Thing
take off."

I'm like That old man. I think
I'll hang around + watch the

This thing take off —

the
revolution when people realize
the ^{religious} freedom they have when they
fully understand the work of the
H/S.

I read something this week that
excited me. I want you to go
back in time — me, to a time
before the invention of the printing
press. Go back to a time when
people told the stories passed down
from generation to generation —
from Joel's time to Jesus' time to
the time of the great cathedrals of
the Middle Ages. If any of you
have seen a Sean Connery movie
called "The Name of the Rose" you
have an idea of the time. Cold
weather, bad food, + inconsistent
plumbing. The period called the Dark
Ages.

But there was one bright spot
in the darkness where medieval
men + women could gather for
comfort, care + discipleship
training. That place was The

local cathedral. Isn't it ironic that the churches built in the dark ages are known by their stained glass windows. Our ancestors in Europe + the middle East had a bible but it wasn't a book - it was a building the frescoes, murals, sculptures, icons, windows, painted domes, the drama + the pageantry - the very Eucharist - the Lord's Supper - all told the stories of the faith. The cathedral offered comfort, beauty, + security for all who entered the door. The poor were fed, the traveler housed, the sick nursed back to health.

Diana Eck in her book Encountering God reveals some surprising aspects of religion in the medieval church. In those days, the liturgical calendar - its different seasons of the year, different colors, special days shaped the lives of the villagers. Festivals, saints days, holy days were all lived

& breathed in their world. & Professor Eck discovered that Pentecost was one of the most unique & creatively celebrated days. In 10th C Rome the church knew how to throw a really spectacular birthday party for the Holy church.

The custom of painting heavenly scenes on the great domes served not only to inspire devotion but also to conceal some discreet trap doors. During the Pentecost service some daring person would climb up on the roof & at the appropriate moment during the liturgy would open these doors & release live doves.

Can you imagine looking up at a beautifully painted dome & suddenly seeing these swooping, diving symbols of the HS descending below. At the same time the choir was chanting as though a ~~swelling~~^{RUSHING} wind was sweeping thru the cathedral with a whashing,

drumming sound and as all
this was going on the ceiling
openings ^{opened} ~~opened~~ & bushels of red rose
petals would shower down on
the congregation. These red,
flashing bits of flowers symbolized
the tongues of flame falling down
upon all who waited below in faith.

We think we know how to do church
with our screens & videos & praise
bands & amplifiers - Honey, that's
doing church!

So what's Pentecost all about?

1. The HS is given to us to revolutionize
us & change our lives. To free &
liberate us & yet remind us that
God really lives in us.
2. Walls are broken down between
believers. Everyone hears the gospel
in words that were meaningful
to them in their own language.
What had been ~~broken~~ ^{shattered} at the
tower of Babel was made whole

at Pentecost

3. The church is empowered & fueled in the joint hands of X being the Christ - sent into the Community & the world.

God's holy awesome power was poured out - like doves & rose petals - on the people empowering them to spread the good news of freedom to all people. And that same power is available to us today.

Transformed lives - broken barriers - an empowered church. Welcome Cornerstone to a ^{FRESH} ~~new~~ start on this the birthday of the Hian Church. Happy birthday Church - Wherever the Spirit of God abides, a revolution is brewing & God will make all things new.
Amen

Date: 6/24/01

Sermon: Looking in the Mirror

Reference Text: 1 Kings 19:1-15a, Galatians
Luke 8:26-39 3:23-29

When we look in the mirror
do we really know who we are?

One day a salesman stopped by
a farmhouse. He knocked & the lady
of the house came to the door.

"Is your husband home?" he asked.
"He sure is," the woman said. "He's
over at the cow barn."

"Well, I have something I'd like to
show him," said the salesman. "Will
I have any difficulty finding him?"
"You shouldn't have any difficulty,"
she answered. "He's the one with the
beard & mustache!"

Elijah was the major prophet
after Moses. — as a matter of fact
it was said that when the Messiah
came he would be a leader like
Moses, a king like David & a prophet
like Elijah.

I don't know how many of you
remember the story but Elijah has

has just won a major victory for God over the prophets of Baal. His country had a horrible drought & Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal that whoever could call upon their God to end the drought, that God would become the God of Israel. The king - Ahab ~~was~~ married to the evil queen Jezebel - and you all know evil Queens - Jezebel had imported hundreds of Baal priests & prophets and had convinced Ahab to allow her to build a temple to Baal adjacent to the palace. Elijah knew he had to drive out the priests of Baal & he challenged them to a contest. They would build two bonfires and whoever's God would call down thunder & lightning & start the bonfire would win. Elijah even doused his fire three times with water & ^{Y H W H} ~~that~~ spoke in the thunder & lightning & caused fire to consume the pile of logs while the Baal priests prayed fruitlessly but Baal was silent.

Now Elijah was running for his life because he was afraid of

BAAZ WAS THE STORM GOD!

Jezabel. He had won the contest on Mt Carmel - the long devastating drought was over in the storm that followed the Thunder & lightning. But now he had to contend with Jezabel - who, needless to say, was just a little angry & had put a price on his head. The triumph of God had brought to a head the animosity of the court toward God's prophet. Elijah forgot who he was and ran ~~from Carmel in the north~~ ^{and kept} on running all the way across Judah to its most southern town of Beersheba. He ran there because it was a major sanctuary - and he leaves his servant at Beersheba & continues even further south - so far that he finds himself at Mt. Horeb - Mt Sinai - where Moses had met God. Maybe what Elijah was doing was looking for his roots - maybe he wanted to be where he knew God had been met before - maybe he thought that if he could get back

to God he could find out who he really was - God's hero or God's coward - one who had beaten 100's of Baal's priests & prophets or one who was afraid of Baal's queen. Maybe he had to find out if he was just boasting in God or a true believer. At any rate, he runs to Jizir - and prays that God would take him in the night so he would not have to face morning.

Have you ever been really depressed, scared & even suicidal? That's where Elijah was. And God ministered to him. Elijah's first need was care & food. He was cared for & fed & rested by a messenger of God. We throw the word angel around too easily. Pop TV shows introduce us to an array of angels. "Touched by an Angel" is a good example. Ellen Melissa Ethridge hosts a show

which tells the story of people touched in unexpected ways by angels - but the word means messengers & Biblical angels always come bearing messages from God - like Mary's messenger, for example. So Elijah is fed & saved for - but that's not the real purpose. The real purpose is to give him his "mission impossible". He is fed, because he has to go back - this time God - Himself - speaks to him "What are you doing here, Elijah. How many of us - big & brave - when the chips are down saved like Elijah. "I have been very jealous for the Lord ^{God} th^{is} hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, & slain thy prophets with the sword & I, only I, am left & they seek my life to take it away."

Once in the early days of MCC - when many of us were fighting for the UFMCC to be in the forefront of the use

of inclusive language - a group of
women ministers & lay women
had put together a newsletter called
the Mother Eagle Review, which
carried news of women clergy -
suggestions for using inclusive
language - new hymns - inclusive
Psalms - when all this was very
new & very controversial and one
of the women - not me - had written
an article describing a very very
male oriented ordination service
of her pastor and made a lot of
people mainly men very angry -
so angry that it was brought
up on the floor of Gen. Conf. in
Denver & when it came up I was
called on to answer for all the
women of Mother Eagle & when I
looked around for support - everyone
had left the room & I was the
only one left & I swear Elijah's
speech "I only I am left & they
seek my life to take it away!"
came to mind.

But you know 25 years later

I'm still here - I defended the women as best I could - defended the use of inclusive language + when I look around now - all the others are gone + I'm left only now I'm an elder statesman -

* But I still know how Elijah felt.

God had a new mission for Elijah. He was to return to the north - announce a new king in Syria, a new king in Israel, and a new young prophet Elisha to carry on his work.

When you look in the mirror who do you see? Elijah saw a coward; God saw a hero.

Let's fast forward a few centuries. Jesus has just calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee & has crossed over to the other side. There he met a man who had demons. Elisha's depression & this man's

mental illness, neither one well understood in their time. This man was so violently insane that no one could contain him - certainly not chains. People were terrified of him. When he looked in a mirror, he saw a madman - but Jesus saw a child of God. When Jesus asked his name - he said "Legion" a Roman legion was a regiment of 6000 soldiers. Doubtless this man had seen a Roman legion on the march & in his poor afflicted mind he felt that there was not one demon but a whole army of them. It may be, as Barclay suggests, that the word haunted him because he had seen the atrocities carried out by a Roman legion when he was a child. It is possible that it was the sight of such atrocities that had made him mad.

Remember the figs? Barclay says what probably happened was this. A herd of swine was

feeding on a mountain side —
Remember, this was gratch territory.
Jesus was exerting his power to
cure what was a very difficult case.
Suddenly the man's shouts & screams
disturbed the swine & they went
dashing down the mountainside
into the sea in blind terror "Look"
said Jesus, "Your demons are gone!"

the man looked in the mirror & saw
a madman — Jesus looked and
saw a child of God in terror.
And suddenly the townspeople
saw the madman ^{no longer} ~~demons~~, clothed &
in his right mind

A story is told of Boris Blum who
spent years in a ^{Nazi} concentration camp.
Not long after he was released from
the camp, Boris & some fellow prisoners
spent the night in an abandoned
German house. There were several
mirrors in the house. This was
fascinating to these men because
they hadn't seen any mirrors in

all the years they were in the concentration camps. As the men crowded around one of these mirrors Boris was horrified to discover that he didn't recognize himself. He literally didn't know which of the reflections ~~were~~ ^{was} his. He had to make faces at himself in the mirror before he could pick out his own reflection from the reflections of the other men. His torturous time in the concentration camp had changed him so much he didn't recognize the person he had become.

I wonder if that doesn't happen to all of us at one time in our life or another. We become surprised at the person we have become. Maybe we are even shocked at the person we have become. And most of it is because of our choices.

A trusted advisor of President Lincoln's

recommended a candidate for Lincoln's cabinet. Lincoln declined. When he was asked why, he said, "I don't like the man's face." "But the poor man is not responsible for his face," his advisor insisted. "Everyone over 40 is responsible for his face."

Who are you - who am I - when we look ourselves in the face in the mirror. Paul says "we are all children of God thru faith in Jesus X."

Elijah, the coward, running for his life, was shown the face of God. ~~At~~ The Gerasene demoniac, bursting his chains, saw the face of Jesus & was clothed & in his right mind. You & I - whoever we think we are when we look in the mirror must realize that God looks at us thru Christ & sees only that we are children of God.

So this is who we are - children
of God, This is our true identity.
We can relax. We are in good
hands. We no longer need fear God
or hide from God or avoid God.

You + I are beloved children. Many
people are depressed or even
mentally ill because they don't
know who - or whose - they are.
You know now. Go home + look
in the mirror + tell yourself
that you are God's child - clothed
and in your right mind - ready
to listen to the still small voice
which is always a voice of love.

Go home + look in your mirror
happy child of God.

Amen

How Is This Our Story?

For Dottie - and the rest of you!

The AC in a RC church had broken down and they had had to hire a repair man to crawl around in the ducts & figure out what was wrong. As the man peeked through one of the vents into the sanctuary, he saw his neighbor, an elderly woman kneeling by the altar, apparently praying her rosary. The man just could not resist the temptation to mess w/ this poor woman's mind.

In his most authoritative voice he said, "This is Jesus. Your prayers will be answered."

She didn't blink! She just kept on w/ her praying. Maybe she didn't hear him - so he tried again. "This is Jesus. Your prayers will be answered."

No reaction. Mustering up a big breath of air, ^{he} decided to try one more time. "This is Jesus. ^{X - the Son of God} Your prayers will be answered."

~~The little old lady did not blink~~
The good Catholic woman looked
up and answered "Young man,
Quiet please! I am trying to
talk to your mother."

A pastor I know leads a weekly
Bible study at her church and
always asks the same question at
the end of her teaching portion
"How is this our story?" How
is Hosea our story? We hope
it is NOT our story. We may not
want to identify with Hosea or
Gomer, maybe especially not
Israel or Judah - at least not
at this point in their history. The
text is strange - Why would
Israel's God instruct a holy
man, a prophet to marry an
unfaithful woman - a temple
prostitute - for that is what the
Hebrew says she was - to symbolize
the unfaithfulness of God's people.
We're Christians - we want to see
ourselves as faithful & holy, not

sinful & broken. We actually
believe we are better than that.
Some of us anyway. Others of
us are beating ourselves up
and are aware that we're
either Hosea or Gomer or maybe
a little bit of both. Now, I
was raised a Calvinist. By hard
work & determination, you could
be a success & if you were, it
would prove you were one of
God's elect.

I'm from a broken home - and
in the 1920's that was not very
common. I spent years in a foster
family & more years in a
children's home. I tell Tish &
my lover - both of whom are
social workers that I am the
only one I know who was
raised by social workers. I
certainly was not one of the
elect. So I went looking
for a very different kind of
God than the one my family
introduced me to.

I think Hasea's God and I
would have gotten along. I
think many of us can understand
how Hasea's story is our story, too.

Life - the basics - depend on God.
All of us - even those of us abandoned
at birth - owe our very existence
to others - people who cared for us,
helped us to this point in our
journey thru life - & pointed us
in the direction of God. The
more independent we are, the
less we feel we can depend
on God. The less we depend on
God, the less grateful & humble
we become. We become like
Israel, hardened to God's calling,
disobedient to God's ways &
turned inward to our own
wants & wishes. Israel was
like that. Solomon had left it
wealthy, trade was prospering, they
had alliances - wealthy neighbors
and, if you've ever read the
O.T. they screwed up - over & over

again - They went from being
fervent followers of Yahweh
to looking over at their neighbors
& wishing they had what their
neighbors had - wealth, power,
& plenty - and Ba'al as their
God who must be powerful
because, ^{just} look at our neighbors.
And the good puritanical
Israelites hesitated the Bible said
after foreign Gods. Well, heck, they
had all those gorgeous temples
and all those gorgeous temple
prostitutes and why not go on over
and give it a try. And along
come the prophets - saying don't
go there. But they do - over &
over again - until God is fed up
w/ them & decides to let them be
captured by one of the wealthier
neighbors they want so much to be
like. There is nothing like a
little oppression to humiliate you -
as most of us know.

So along comes Hosea. Good,
faithful, holy man Hosea.

WISHED

and he tells him to marry one
of those temple prostitutes. Where
yet he will have children by
her - "Go take to yourself a
wife of harlotry, & have children
of harlotry" - they may not even
be biologically his children -
And he is to give them funny
names - Calling his son Jezreel
would be like Billy Graham
& Jesse Jackson calling a child
born to their wives - maybe
out of wedlock - Watergate
or Viet Nam. Signs of great
failure - because at Jezreel
~~the~~ ~~the~~ the Royal house of the
Omriids kings of Israel - had been
massacred by the house of
Jehu the king of Judah, supposedly
because Omri was unfaithful
to God & had followed foreign
Gods - but here we were
under Jeroboam from the
house of Jehu - and guess what
they were following Baal
& chasing after foreign Gods.

Second child, "Not fitted"

^{they were already in exile}
Lo-Rukamah "for I will
no longer have pity on the
house of Israel - but I will
have ~~pity~~ ^{pity} on Judah & I
will deliver them - save them
from exile - which didn't
happen - but God did restore
them & return them from exile
not by bow, nor sword, not by
war, not by horses or horsemen,
but by the hand of God." A good
Persian emperor freed them!

And a 3rd child "Not my people"
Lo-ammi - "for you are not
my people & I am not your
God."

Did you ever feel like that. All
your failures looking you right
in the face & feeling like even
God didn't feel sorry for you &
you weren't even God's child any
more.

How is Hosea our story. ^{Right about} there.

But - and in the O.T. there
is always a but! Yet you
will come back. The people
will be ~~numbered like~~ ^{as many as} the sand
of the sea, which cannot be
counted & "You are not my
people shall be called
Children of the Living God
& not pitted has obtained mercy."

No matter how bad things are
God always comes thru. That's
the message of hope.

God does not leave us hanging
wondering or guessing when
it comes to hope. Life may be
a mystery, but there is always
hope when we place our trust
in God. God is always
tempering judgment ^{& grace} with mercy.
Over & over again that is the
message of the O.T.

When Desmond Tutu met in the
council of Bishops of the

Methodist Church in 5/99

he told them "God does not love us because we are lovable, but we are lovable because God loves us."

Okay - How is this our story - ever have a ^{really} bad relationship, or been abandoned, or hit bottom in some way - alcohol, drugs - your family & your pastor telling you you were going to hell because you were gay & God couldn't love a sinner like you. Life unfortunately is like that. We sometimes find ourselves in a pit - and then we remember Hosea, and all our failures are forgiven, we are given mercy & we are reminded once more that we are children of the living God.

Jesus knew that. Was the situation any different - well it wasn't Babylon & Assyria - but were the Romans any better - And there wasn't Boad

luring the people away but there were the many of the same temptations and the disciples asked "Teach us to pray." And Jesus taught them a very simple prayer.

God, let your name be held in reverence
Let your kingdom come
Give to each of us our bread for
the day
Forgive us our sins as we too
forgive those indebted to us
And lead us not into temptation

And then Jesus tells them a story about a man - a guest who is out of bread.

A hospitality story to explain what God is like.

This story always bothered me -
Did we have to batter at heaven's door until God got tired of us and did what we needed?

I think a lot of my childhood
& youth I felt that way — but
that's not the point of the
story — If a friend will fail
you out in the middle of the
night — How MUCH MORE will God
do for you than that.

Scared, hopeless — feel like you're
battering at God & your prayers
& nothing is happening? How
is this our story? The friend comes
thru — How much more will God
come thru.

Failure — not pitied — not my people
+ Prayer

Forgiven — under mercy & grace —
~~Child~~ Children of the living & loving
God.

Bible stories are always our stories.
Go home & remember God will do so
much more, that you are
under grace & you are always
a child of God. How much more do you
need?
Amen

I think a lot of my childhood
is spent & felt that way - but
that is not the point of the
story - If a friend will fail
you are in the middle of the
story - How MUCH MORE will you
do for your friend than.

Learn, listen - just like you're
listening to God & your friend
& nothing is happening? How
is this even story? The friend comes
from - How much more will you
come than.

Failure - not failure - not my friend
but my friend - I am a
Forgiveness - when we're a grace
to the children of the living & learned
the world. It's the world
to the world are a living and strong.
to have a reminder God will do so
much more, that you are
a child of God. + you are always
a child of God. How much more do you
need.

Date: 8/5/01

Sermon: God promises a restoration

Reference Text: Hosea 11: 1-11, Colossians 3: 1-4
Luke 12: 13-21

I love bumper stickers. I have noticed that young feminists have the most interesting cars to read - beginning with "take your laws off my body" but this week someone and I don't know who it is - sent me some religious bumper stickers.

Some are very applicable to our situation today.

"Don't wait for 6 strong men to take you to church!"

"Forbidden fruits create many jams?"

"God loves everyone, but probably prefers 'fruits of the Spirit' to 'religious nuts.'" Now that's an MCC bumper sticker!

"God promises a safe landing not a calm passage."

"Coincidence is when God chooses to remain anonymous."

"Be ye fishers of men. You catch 'em. God will clean them."

What's your God like? That's not an easy question to answer & many great people have tried to tell us what God is like. The Bible is full of examples. Jesus tried to tell us by telling stories. God is like the father of the prodigal, right? The Psalmist talked about God being a fortress, ~~the~~ the rock of his salvation, and Deuteronomy says that God is like a mother eagle teaching her young to fly.

I don't know how many of you are parents or have had a hand in raising kids, but Hosea certainly speaks to parents - both male & female - when he likens God to the parent of a disobedient child - One so bad that they had to go to court with this delinquent child.

I don't know about you - but I have been there. I have two sons - both of whom went through rebellious teens in the early 70s.

they broke into the Jewish community center in N. D. and took money out of the soda machine + ~~stole~~ stole basketballs. They also stole some Tulane university football game tickets + were peddling them in the local bars. Needless to say they were picked up by the police + I was among a number of embarrassed parents - a school principle, a psychiatrist, and a ^{my} school teacher who was also a ~~S.S.~~ R.E. director. We wound up in children's court.

Hasa's God winds up in children's court. That's what's happening in the verses we read. God has a bad kid - Israel or Ephraim. God has him a good parent - nurturing + loving

When Israel was a child I loved him + out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them the more they went from me.

they kept sacrificing to Baals
& burning incense to idols.

But it was I who taught Ephraim
to walk. I took them up in
my arms, but they didn't
know that I healed them.

I led them in cords of compassion
with the bands of love
& I became as one of them
I lifted them to my cheek
& bent down & fed them.

So much for the vengeful God
of the O.T. Hosea shows us a
God in a broken heart, bleeding
over God's disobedient
children.

Lloyd Ogilvie is a pastor in
Hollywood - where for a long
time they had a ministry to
Gay people - but Ogilvie wrote
a book called "God of the
impossible" in which he
introduces a lot of O.T.

characters + Hosea is one of those and he makes some interesting comments about Hosea + Hosea's God. He says God is lonely for us.

Recently many of us have been feeling xiled from our churches. I certainly know I have. For 38 years - ~~actually~~ I have been in church nearly every Sunday and suddenly I got a phone call telling me not to come to church. It hit like a ton of bricks. I solved it by going to church 75 miles away, but it was about a month before I could arrange that, and I found myself lonely for God. But did you ever think that God was lonely for you? That's the picture Hosea paints of God. God is lonely for God's people who turn away and go following other gods.

the first picture he gives us
is of a man - a holy man -
who marries a temple prostitute
and when she returns to her
former life he agonizes over
her & misses her.

If his hearers didn't understand
that - he uses ^{the picture of} ~~the~~ delinquents
~~and~~ children whom he loves
& misses when they run away
~~from him~~ from home.

Every one of us can relate to
loneliness. We have all been
there. We've all had relationships
where the other partner slipped
out of the relationship - ~~we~~ ^{many}
~~we~~ ^{have} had the experience of a
child disappointing us. We, as
gay people, understand loneliness.
You can't hang out at the water
~~front~~ ^{cooler} with guys as easily as
the straights do & chase the
other employees - it's just a
little harder to meet the man

or woman of your dreams
& it's just a little tougher
when it doesn't work out.

But God! God doesn't
experience things like that
does God. Haha says yes,
God does.

Erich Fromm, the psychoanalyst
says "the deepest need of a human
being is the need to overcome
his separateness, to leave the
prison of aloneness."

In many ways that's what
church is all about. Oh yes,
you can have a relationship $\bar{c}$
God all by yourself — but it's
hard. Church makes it easier
to leave that prison of alone-
ness and build bridges instead
of walls. We need other people
to keep us from feeling
separate and alone — but we
need many kinds of relationships

Certainly we need the retalcoashy
a loader - that's a basic human
need for love + affection - but
hear me - don't expect your
lover to meet every one of
your needs. You will wind up
being hated! We cannot suck
another human being dry -
and then expect them to give
out of an empty well. Every
one needs people - a variety
of people - to really meet our
needs + that's where churches
help - work helps - school helps.
We get a variety of experiences
a variety of people.

And we need a relationship
with God.

All of us know what it feels
like to think that God has
left us. David, the psalmist
said "How long, O God, ~~how~~
~~long~~ will Thou forget me
forever?"

How long will thou hide Thy face
from me?

~~On Isaiah 45~~ ~~They~~

We pray + our prayers seem to
return like boomerangs, un-
answered or unheeded. We
don't see any sign of God's
love + guidance. We are
left alone in our rebellion.
Sometimes we wish God would
head us off at the pass, wake
us up w/ a word of warning,
keep us from doing something
that would demigrate our
dignity. We write on the
wall "Please stop me" and
we wish God would intervene.
We scream, with the Jews at
Auschwitz, "God where are you?!"

And God is waiting. Sometimes
we're the barn-brewer of Jesus'
story - full of plenty + no place
to store it + what do we need
God for. Fat + sassy, self-satisfied
we're egotistical enough to think

we don't need God, we don't need
rules - I can make it up as
I go along. And God waits
while we feel self-satisfied.
And yearns for us.

God says "I cannot let you
go."

You know that's good news
for us as gay & lesbian people.

People tells us God hates us - that
God has abandoned us - that
we are an abomination.

Last term I did a speaking
engagement for the gay group
at UAB - along c Richard Barkham
& Mark Moore and it always
fascinates me that people are
still being fed those horrible
messages & churches are still
telling their congregations that

And yet if you really read the Bible, God is crying. God is weeping because we believe them. God is crying - because even ^{in the case of} Homer - who had gone off back to ritual prostitution God was telling Hosea - Go get her, take her back.

God is always ready to take us back. That's the important message for us. Nobody can throw you out of God's love, nobody can abandon you - nobody can tell you God doesn't love you.

God has been crying in loneliness waiting for you. Come on back to God.
Amen -

And yet if you really read the Bible, that is crying. That is weeping because we believe them. God is crying because even though ^{in the case} - when he gave off back to return prostitution that was taking place - he got him, take him back.

That is always people to take no back, that's the important message for us. That's why can throw you out of this house, nobody can remove you - nobody can tell you how many love you. That has been crying in darkness waiting for you. Come on back to that. Amen.

Date: 8/18/01

Sermon: The Great Cloud of Witnesses
Isaiah 5:1-7

Reference Text: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

What do you think of when you see two clean-cut young men wearing white shirts + ties, dark pants on bicycles. Mormons.

You do not need to see their ID's you just know.

Funny story about two young Mormon missionaries who were going door to door. They knocked on the door of one woman who was not at all happy to see them. She told them in no uncertain terms that she did not want to hear their message + slammed the door in their faces.

To her surprise, however, the door did not close - In fact, almost magically, it sprang back open.

She tried again, really putting her back into it and slammed the door again with the same amazing results.

Convinced that one of the young men was sticking his foot in the door, she reared back & gave it a third try. She felt this would really teach these wise young religious zealots a lesson, but before she could act, one of them stopped her & politely said, "Ma'am, before you do that again, you really should move your cat."

Just as in our time, we recognize orthodox Jews by their skull caps, Mormons by their clothing & choice of transportation — the Jews of Jesus' time could identify the characters in their history by just an allusion. Both the Isaiah passage & the passage from Hebrews are those kinds of allusions. They are not the whole story because the whole story was told somewhere else. But a word or two would remind people of the story.

"Vineyard" was one of those allusions. The Vine was a familiar symbol for Israel. You could look in almost any direction in ancient Israel and see vineyards. People did not drink the water. They drank wine. It was the beverage everyone knew & used. I don't know if you ~~remember~~ the story of the spies who were sent out ^{of Egypt} into Canaan to see what the land was like who came back carrying enormous clusters of grapes. Today, even the symbol of the modern State of Israel is drawn from that story. Israel's logo shows two men $\bar{c}$ a stick on their shoulders carrying one enormous cluster of grapes. It was familiar in their architecture a great cluster of golden grapes adorned the front of the temple.

Always. Israel was the vineyard and God the vineyard keeper.

But the Bible is a story of a love affair gone bad. God's relationship, to many of the prophets was that of a relationship that had soured.

God as the cosmic lover who is constantly being jilted is an old theme + Isaiah's passage today is a love song - a bitter end.

God's beloved people keep turning away + do not live the ethical lives the prophet's believe God is calling them to.

It ends with a Hebrew play on words

... he looked for justice - mishpat

... but behold bloodshed = mishpak

... for righteousness + sedaka

... but behold a cry for help - ts'e'aka.

Word play, allegories, love stories between God + Israel are the stock in trade of the prophets who knew their people's story. And that's what the bible is - it's the story of a people's journey

is God. Is it literally true? Is my story about the mormons ~~not~~ literally true. Maybe - maybe not, but it illustrates a point - and that's what Bible stories are intended to do. They illustrate a point and because they usually deal in human behavior, they are valuable & meaningful 2+ even 4-5 thousand years later because human beings haven't changed much. There are still the lover who is spurned, the would be conqueror & the conquered, the evil landlord & the unsuspecting tenant. Stock characters, but we can relate because we've been there.

My mother & father were divorced. Today that's a meaningless statement. Half of the parents are divorced - if they were ever married in the first place. But in 1930 that was not the case. Very few people got divorces. First of all, they were

expensive. You had to pay lawyers + court cost. And for people who barely had enough to eat, court costs were out of the question. But my mom could afford a divorce. My mom was from an old New York family - my dad was from a dozen generations of preachers - + my granddad dreamed of having a farm + met a ~~Scotch~~^{Austrian} girl + messed up the family lineage. When my father remarried - my step grandmother was very impressed by my dad's first wife's family + when we misbehaved would remind me - "Remember who you are!" I never really knew my mother, but I grew up knowing whose I was.

As Christians, we need to know our history - but far more importantly we need to remember whose we are. We are God's people - bought & paid for by ^{the} love of X - redeemed as a

heavy cost. You are loved.
You have a God in love &
you who despair every time
you wander away. That's what
Isaiah says.

The passage from Hebrews does
something very like that.

While Isaiah was trying to head
off Israel being captured - Hebrews
was talking to people who
already had been. How do you
live when the oppressor is all
around you. How did the Jews live
when the Nazis were searching
door to door for them? How did
the early Christians live when Rome
was searching door to door for
them. You live by faith is always
the biblical answer. By faith
Moses took them out of captivity -
by faith Joshua & a little band
fought a major battle against the
city of Jericho & won. By faith, a
Canaanite woman, Rahab, a prostitute

by trade believed in the Hebrew god
+ helped the Israelites scouts.

Gideon - who looked for soldiers
who would scoop water up in
their hands + drink rather than
cupfuls. Barak - + he forgets that
Deborah really won that battle;
Samson tearing down the infidel
temple, Jephthah the illegitimate
son who hosted + fed a huge army -
but sacrificed his daughter to do
it. People of faith who lived
heroically for God - who did it
because they believed. That's
what he's saying to the early,
frightened, oppressed, threatened
little groups of ^{Jesus} Christians. Remember
your history. Remember whose
you are + live heroically.

He reminds them of a parallel
time in history - which, by the way
doesn't get into protestant bibles
but does into Catholic + Jewish
bibles.

About 168 BC Antiochus ^{a Syrian}
was forbidden by Rome to attack

Egypt. He was mad because he couldn't have his own way & he attacked Jerusalem on his way home. 80,000 were killed & 10,000 sold into captivity. He sacked the temple, carried off the golden altar, candle sticks, vessels even the curtains & veil that sheltered the Torah scrolls was taken. He stole the temple treasury reported to be worth millions. On the altar of burnt offerings he offered swine to Zeus & turned the temple into a brothel - putting in temple prostitutes to Zeus. He forbade circumcision, & made it illegal to own a copy of the scriptures. He ordered the Jews to eat unclean meats & to sacrifice to the Greek Gods.

As historian writes
~~Hebrew~~ says - They underwent great miseries & bitter torments; they were whipped & rods & then bodies were torn to pieces; they were crucified alive; they strangled the women & their sons whom they had circumcised hanging their ~~on~~ sons about their necks

as if they were their crosses. And
if any sacred book ^{of the ~~law~~ law} was found, it
was destroyed & those $\bar{c}$ whom
they were found persecuted miserably.

The X'tians thought about the
parallels - we are being killed
for our faith - but God is faithful.

Okay - it's tough to be a ^{christian} ~~gay~~
under the Roman ~~emperor~~ ~~emperor~~ - but it's easy
compared to what they went through.
And that's the message for us
today.

How do we live when we are
reviled & people think the worst
of us because we are gay. Like
the Jews under Antiochus, like
the X'tians under Rome. We live
by faith. We live $\bar{c}$ integrity,
we live ethically - because
we remember whose we are.

You are a X'tian, bought $\bar{c}$ a price,
loved by a God who sent Jesus
to die for your sins. Remember

whose you are & love in faith.
Amen.

where you can see the future
in the past.

It is a very common thing to see
the future in the past.

It is a very common thing to see
the future in the past.

It is a very common thing to see
the future in the past.

It is a very common thing to see
the future in the past.

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the future in the past.

It is a very common thing to see
the future in the past.

It is a very common thing to see
the future in the past.

Five year old approached her
mom and asked is God a grown-
up or a parent? Mom said "I'm
not sure what you mean." "Is
there a difference between a grown
up & a parent?" "Oh yes," said
the 5yo. "Grown ups love you
when you are good. Parents
love you anyway."

The parent approached the
man and asked as to a grown-
up or parent? "Mum said 'I
don't know what you mean.'"
There is difference between a grown-
up + a parent? "Oh yes," said
the 2nd. "Grown up is one who
when you are good. Parents
love you anyway."

Date: 9/16/01

Sermon: Lost Things

Reference Text: Jeremiah 4: 11-12, 22-28;
I Timothy 1: 12-17; Luke 15: 1-10

In the summer of 1979 - decades after he had been freed from the concentration camp, Elie Wiesel returned to one. Standing in the silence of Birkenau he recalled the imagery of Jeremiah 4: 23-28 and he remembered that in the smoke filled skies above the death camps, there were no birds. They had fled the holocaust. I wonder if there are any birds in downtown N.Y.?

Jeremiah foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Like the suffocating desert wind - the sirocco or simoun - which brought suffocating heat to Palestine, the wind over N.Y. is full of smoke + soot and somehow we understand Jeremiah a little better + wonder

what we have done to displease God.

Jerry Falwell thinks he knows.

Sitting on my couch Tuesday while I waited to hear that my son Jon was okay - my clergy friend, Larry Harne, said "some way they will try to blame this on us. Well Falwell has.

Read article.

Jeremiah + the prophets knew what the cause was. Poverty, misuse of the poor - he talks about selling a man for a pair of sandals. Of the rich eating well while the poor begged for bread. Of rulers who no longer cared about the people but only about their rich cronies.

In America - in one of the boom years - more families could not afford housing than at any time since the depression of 1896 when

people - whole families of
immigrants were living in
furnace rooms + coal bins
because they could not afford
housing. Those were preceded
by the boom years of the 1890's
when the robber barons like
Astor, Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan
were making their millions. Is
it homosexuality, pagans,
feminists, the Civil Liberties
Union + the People for the American
Way that are ruining America
or is it GREED. We have kept
the price of oil artificially low -
everyone in the world has
higher gas prices than the U.S. -
so we could sell bigger, less
gas efficient SUV's and Trucks
and the poor of the world
suffer while a few get richer
+ richer. Why would God permit
destruction to happen? Some-
times God must get fed up with
the recurring stupidity, greediness
+ greed of some people and

want to destroy it all - but God had made a promise in the time of Noah that God would not keep down total destruction but God permitted their enemies to be agents of destruction + God seems to be permitting ours to do the same.

Is all the news bad? No. Evil never wins the whole war. The old Testament always ends on ~~a~~ note of hope. This may happen, but God will restore the people. I believe that that is the lesson of the whole O.T.

"If my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray. If my people who are called by my name will seek my face + turn from their wicked ways then I will hear from heaven I will forgive their sin & heal their land. II Chron 7:14

Paul knew evil; he knew it from the Roman farces surrounding him, the sadistic guards in Jerusalem, the evil emperor Nero — he knew evil. Strangely, he knew evil most personally — within himself. Paul knew that the real root of evil was human beings and he says of himself: "I give thanks to St. our Lord, who has filled me with God's power, that he showed that he believed that he could trust me, by appointing me to his service, although I was formerly an insulter, a persecutor, & a man of insolent & brutal violence."

Paul ^{in his time} was like the people who had perpetrated the air strikes. He had insulted X & X's church; he had flung hot & angry words at the X'tians, accusing them of crimes against God. He was a persecutor; he had taken every means open to him under Jewish

law to annihilate the church.

Then he says something strange about himself. He says he was a man of casual & brutal violence. That word in Greek is Hucrestes. It indicates a kind of arrogant sadism; it indicates a man who is one to inflict pain for the sheer joy of inflicting it. Aristotle defines Hubris in this way: Hubris means to hurt & grieve people in such a way that ~~the~~ shame comes to the man who is hurt & grieved & not that the person who inflicts the hurt & injury may gain anything else in addition to what he already possesses, but simply that he may find delight in his own cruelty & in the suffering of the other person. Thank you, Aristotle - you have just defined Jerry Falwell.

But Paul says this, too.

"But the grace of God rose higher than my sin and I found

it in the faith & love of those
whose lives are lived in J.C.
This is a saying on which we
can rely... that Jesus came into
this world to save sinners - of
whom I am the chief. This was
why I received mercy - so that
in me J.C. might display all
that patience of his, so that
I might be the first outline
sketch of those who would one
day come to believe in him -
that they might find eternal life.
HOPE - Paul says ~~to~~ look at me.
This was who I was - This is
who I am & God did it. Too
often Christians think they saved
themselves and go to God by
being good - They go to God
because God is God & God is
not only just but merciful.

The final lesson is about sheep
going astray. Now most of us are
city folk & what we know about
shepherding has mainly been

learned from interpretations
of the 23rd Psalm. But I do know
this - Sheep are stupid - dumb.
When they caused the phrase
"dumb animals" they had sheep
in mind. Sheep get lost. They
eat their way lost. They just
follow the food & ^{gradually} suddenly
they have wandered away
from the flock. Some of us
are like that. We just follow
where our appetites lead us,
and suddenly we are lost &
have no notion of how we
got there. There are all sorts
of ways to get yourself lost.
And yet ~~there~~ the lesson of
today's scripture is not on
our lostness, the focus is on
God's love.

The lesson is about a sheep
who has gone astray. It's also
about a shepherd who leaves
99 other sheep out in the
wilderness to search for one
lost one. And when the shepherd

finds the wandering one he
put it on his shoulders &
goes home. then he calls his
friends & neighbors together
and parties "Rejoice in me;
I have found my lost sheep."

Palestinian shepherds often
kept community flocks. 2-3 shepherds
would keep hundreds of sheep -
2 would bring the flock home -
the other would stay & find the
lost one. They were responsible
& had to produce the fleece
to prove how it had died. ~~When~~
~~they found~~ the whole village would
be on watch & when in the
distance they saw the shepherd
striding home with the lost sheep
there would be a communal
shout of joy.

That is the picture Jesus drew
of God. That is what God is like
God is as glad when a lost sinner
is found as a shepherd is when a
strayed sheep is brought home.

God knows the joy of finding things that have gotten lost.

Unfortunately the Falwell's of the world worship a different God. They are more likely to say "The silly sheep has made his own bed, let him lie in it." They don't like this picture of God any more than the Pharisees did. What's your view of God. The scowling judge waiting to correct you? The disapproving parent whose love you have to ~~earn~~ ^{earn}. Or the woman searching every rock & corner until she finds her lost coin - and that's another sermon.

Years ago, during the height of the AIDS epidemic, a young male prostitute lay dying. He wanted to hear the story of the shepherd who went out to look for his lost sheep. There were other young men in the room listening as Karen Ziegler

read the story to him. He suddenly
took very peaceful and said
quietly "The Good Shepherd has found
me & I feel very close to his heart."
He died shortly after. At a general
conference one of the young men
who was in that room introduced
himself to Karen. He was an MCC
member in Washington. He said to
her "That evening when the Good
Shepherd brought Ricky in on
one shoulder, I came in on the
other."

^{But}
~~The~~ thousand people are lost
right now. The fire dept & the
reserve squads may give up the
task of finding them. God will never
give up looking for them. Nor will
God give up looking for you.
God loves you with an unconditional
love that never ceases.

read the story to him. He gratefully
took very grateful and said
gratefully "The Good Shepherd has found
me & I feel very close to his heart."
He died shortly after. As a general
conference one of the young men
who was in that room, introduced
himself to Loren. He was an LDS
member in Washington. He said to
him "that evening when the Good
Shepherd blessed Bishop in our
own chambers, I came in on the
other."

But the thousands of people are not
in the room. The five days & the
seven weeks many of the
best of friends of them. Good will never
give up looking for them. How will
the give up looking for you.
God loves you and our responsibilities
are that never cease.

Only what was expected
Lamentations 1:1-6, 2 Timothy 1:1-4
Luke 17:5-10

The Psalm for the day - Psalm 137
says:

By the Rivers of Babylon —
there we sat down + wept
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows we hung our harps.
For there our captors asked us for
songs,

And our tormentors asked for mirth,
saying

"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How could we sing God's song
in a strange land.

Somehow people are finding it
hard to go to entertainments —
and when people do, the
entertainers are having a
hard time not thinking
about what has happened
to us as a nation.

I went to the Altp Stephens
Friday night and heard the

have all centered on the ^{capture and} destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BC certainly a momentous occasion in Jewish history.

These passages are read annually at the Wailing Wall - the only part of the original Jerusalem, ^{Temple Mount} wall left standing to commemorate that historical event as well as the final destruction of ancient Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Romans.

Only God would plan it so those readings would be the ones for the month following the NY tragedy. I'm not a strict believer in predestination but it really makes you wonder.

In the midst of tragedy - where do you go? Many Americans of every religious faith have said "I need God - I need my faith at times like these."

Honey, just getting thru

and ordinary week I need my faith.

The apostles are walking with Jesus and the discussion takes many turns. They talk about not leading another person astray - They talk about forgiveness - and finally they talk about faith. "Give us also faith" - You have it - give us some.

Can you give someone else faith - just hand it to them - I don't think so. ^{Pave talks about time they's mother + grand mother} You can introduce people to faith + hope it will grow in them. ^{giving them faith} I think that's why Jesus likens it to a mustard seed. It starts small and adxer city + life provide it with enough fertilizer that it just grows. Real faith that is.

There is a kind of spurious - imitation faith - that claps its

hands because it's glad of its salvations and sets on them ever after.

Real faith starts with the acceptance that one is loved by God. In the midst of whatever is going on - you & I are not just toys in God's hands - we are loved children of a loving God. God does not just juggle $\bar{c}$ our lives - God knows us and loves us.

juggling reminds me of a funny story - A circus juggler was pulled over for speeding. The officer was suspicious when he looked in the back seat & saw several large knives. "What are you doing $\bar{c}$ those?" he asked.

"I'm a juggler $\bar{c}$ the circus," said the man. To make it more exciting I juggle those large knives."

"Well, show me," said the officer. So the juggler got out of the car & started juggling six of the large knives at once. ~~the~~ knives were flying everywhere, though amazingly they were all under expert control.

While he was performing, another car passed by. The driver of this car did a double take when he saw the juggler throwing six knives up in the air and catching them. He turned to his wife & said "That's it! I'm thru $\bar{c}$ drinking. Why if I ever get stopped, I could never pass one of these new sobriety tests."

Faith is often tested but the result is usually that it grows larger.

God is not juggling $\bar{c}$ our lives. God loves you & me ∇ cares what happens to us.

Most of us do not reach our full potential because we are not convinced that God loves us.

Paul says "I am not ashamed for I know the one in whom my faith is fixed and I am certain that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him until eternity comes."

Do you have that kind of faith that God loves you? Paul bet his life on it and you can too.

The second thing about faith is that it is all a matter of grace. God's love is not something we achieve, but something we accept. God does not ~~love~~ love us because we are holy; God ^{loves} ~~calls~~ us to make us holy. If we had to deserve the love of God ~~the~~ our situation would be helpless & hopeless. God does not love us because we

deserve to be loved, but loves
us because God is God & God's ¹⁹ nature
is love.

The third part of faith is that
it is eternal. God has always
been in the business of love &
God always will be. Many of
us have the idea that God was
once stern and unforgiving
and that only since the life &
death of Jesus ~~to~~ God has been
for giving love. From the
beginning of time God's love
has been searching for us
humans & grace & forgiveness
have been offered — the sad
part was our turning away &
God's tears on our part — as
Jeremiah understood — love
is the essential nature of God.

You are loved - you have always
been loved, you are loved now
& you always will be — no matter
what you may have believed in the

part - the last part is that
faith grows - if you have as
tiny amount of faith as a
mustard seed - and you act
on it - it will grow & you
can accomplish great deeds
with it. Great deeds in
your own life - great deeds
for others.

Listen carefully - there are many
people who have an infatuation
a pale imitation of Christian
faith & never experience the
real thing. There are many people
who say "Oh, yes, I believe
in God. I read my Bible, I say
my prayers." But let something
happen - a see back of some sort,
a heart break, a scare and they
will be asking "why me" what
am I going to do?"

How about trusting God? How
about really leaning on the
everlasting arms that are so
fond of singing about.

The final difference is between believing & trusting. We all believe in God - but not everybody trusts that God is in control - in control of our lives, our health, our finances our future.

Did you see Indiana Jones & the last crusade? Indy's quest is to find the Holy Grail - the chalice used by X at the last supper. To prove himself Indy must face life threatening challenges that test his humility, his obedience & his trust.

In the final challenge, Indy finds himself teetering on the brink of a deep, vast chasm. The way, according to the legends lies right before him. But he cannot see it. He must step out in faith, with no tangible assurance of support. He must trust what his eyes cannot see. Fearful but determined he steps out... and discovers himself standing on a bridge of rock, solid & firm beneath his feet but ~~invisible~~ ^{invisible} to the eye.

we've all stood on that rock at
one time or another.

As we seek to do God's will - that's
when we sense God's presence
undergirding us. And it reminds
us ~~God~~ God is in control. Even a tiny
bit of faith - a tiny bit - is enough
to carry us. Let go & let God lead.
God loads you.

Date: 8/14/01

Sermon: An Attitude of Gratitude

Reference Text: Jeremiah 29: 4-7;

1 Timothy 2: 8-15; Luke 17: 11-19

A juggler with a circus was pulled over for speeding. The officer was suspicious when he looked in the back seat and saw several large knives. What are you doing with those? he asked.

"I'm a juggler with a circus," said the man. "To make it more exciting I juggle those large knives."

"Well show me," said the officer. So the juggler started juggling six of the large knives at once. Knives were flying everywhere, though amazingly all were under expert control.

While he was performing, another car passed by. The driver of this car did a double-take when he saw the juggler throwing six knives up in the air at one time and catching them. He turned to his wife & said, "That's it. I'm through drinking. Why if I ever got stopped, I could never pass one of those new sobriety tests."

okay it's funny - but Alcoholism isn't funny. I've been one & I know it was no fun. My weekends started on Thursday night & ended on Monday. Out of seven days, I was sober - if I was lucky only two. I was too stupid to pray.

^{Gospel} Our story is about nine stupid guys & one who was smart.

Everyone knows about the Good Samaritan. He's one of the best known people in the Bible. We know he belonged to a despised people - Samaritans - people who did not keep the law in the prescribed way and who had intermarried with foreigners. He was the surprise hero in Jesus' parable. We know he was compassionate & generous & paid an innkeeper out of his own pocket for the upkeep of a stranger who had been stripped, robbed, beaten & left for dead beside the road in Jericho.

We all know about the Good Samaritan - but today's story is about the grateful Samaritan.

This Samaritan was a member of

a group of ten lepers who asked
Jesus for mercy.

— Have you ever asked Jesus
for mercy? Have you ever
gotten on your knees & prayed,
"God I'm scared - have mercy
on me."

About 3 years ago I got a call
from my son that he needed
Bail money to get out of jail. He
had been picked up on a DUI. They
had found a white powder ^{in an envelope} under
the floor mat. He had abandoned
his wife & two small kids - one
newborn - was having an affair
& the girl was pregnant.

"God, have mercy" don't let my
son go through the same kind
of mess I made of my life at
that age.

A plane flew into the World Trade
Center - my other son works on

that street "God have mercy."

"My friend has AIDS." God have mercy!

Have you ever asked God for mercy?

Have you ever knelt in the darkness
and pled to Heaven because there
was no where else to turn. Maybe
you can understand these lepers.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem
& stopped at a village. Just a village -
a village with no name. But on the
outskirts were 10 lepers standing
off to one side. They did not -
could not - were not permitted
to approach Jesus. They knew they
dared not. Leprosy was such
a dread disease that those
who were afflicted with it were
not even allowed to come close
to those who were well. 50
yards downwind. They could
never go home, never see their
families, never hold their children.
Never sit down at a table with their
loved ones. "Jesus have mercy
on us."

Do you know what the best known
prayer today is - The Lord's Prayer?
The Prayer of Jabez? No. It's the
Serenity prayer - God, grant me
the serenity to accept the things I
cannot change, the courage to
change the things I can & the
wisdom to know the difference.
It's the prayer of 12 step programs,
alcohol, drug, food, love
addictions.

Certainly those of us in the gay
community understand addiction.
But we are not alone. It's no
longer a big city - shield row
problem. It's epidemic. The
Nat'l Center on Addiction & Substance
abuse revealed that in any given
month 8th graders in small town
America were twice as likely to
have used amphetamines, 83%
more likely to have used crack,
50% more likely to have used
cocaine, 34% more likely to have
smoked marijuana, 29% more

likely to have drunk alcohol + 70% percent more likely to have been intoxicated than their big city peers.

Here's the scary part. If they don't stop they will die. My Tulane magazine says that 2 of every 3 people sick enough to die are sick because of preventable diseases caused by addicting substances.

A patient who keeps coming into Reversview was so addicted to alcohol that when he couldn't afford it - he drank anti-freeze + destroyed his heart + kidneys.

A good friend + church member from Providence burned out her lungs +

kidneys sniffing aluminum spray paint.

A scientist tried an experiment c cocaine + monkeys. If they pulled a lever they got cocaine. Every

monkey ended up killing themselves. When he withheld the fix the monkeys tried over & over to get the cocaine 12,800 times. Addictions are powerful - and they are demonic.

the truth is that every addict is someone's son or daughter, Dad or mother, husband, wife or lover. More importantly they are - we are - you are children of God. God cares.

Ten lepers - Thousands of addicts people having trouble facing themselves & forgetting that they are beloved children of a loving God.

Clyde Best of Redwood City is a maintenance instructor for United Airlines. Clyde often stops on his way to work for donuts for himself & his trainees. There is usually a street person

hanging around looking for small change.

One day when Clyde did not have a class he felt compelled to stop & talk to one of these men. They wound up sitting on a bus stop bench sharing coffee & an apple fritter. When Clyde asked the man if he could pray for him, the man said. "I don't need anyone to pray for me - I just need someone to talk to that will treat me as a human being."

I wonder if the 10 lepers felt that ~~same~~ way when Jesus stopped to talk to them.

There's a story about Albert Schweitzer - a theologian, musician, physician, missionary & humanitarian at his hospital in Lambarene.

It was about 11 am. The equatorial sun beat down mercilessly, & a group of visitors

was walking up a hill -
dr. Schweitzer. Suddenly Schweitzer
left the group & strode across the
slope of a hill where an African
woman was struggling upward
with a huge backload of wood
for the cook fires. They watched
in both admiration & concern as
85 yo. Schweitzer took the load
of wood & carried it up the hill
for the released woman.

When they reached the top one
of the group asked Schweitzer why
he did things like that. Schweitzer's
answer, "No one should ever
have to carry a burden like that
alone."

Jesus saw 10 lepers "Go slow
yourselves to the priests." Be
readmitted to society. Be healed
be redeemed.

One came back & said "Thank you"
Have you been there. Are you
grateful for your sobriety? Are
you grateful you have never been
there?

Every one of us has been
blessed beyond measure.
Suppose you had lost everything
& suddenly had it all given
back to you. Would you be
grateful? We must show our
gratitude by passing it on -
rather than just passing by.
That's the true attitude of
gratitude. Amen.

Date: 10/21/01

Sermon: Another Praying Woman

Reference Text: Jeremiah 31:27-34,
"Timothy 3:14 - 4:5; Luke 18:1-8

Two twelve year old boys, Bob & Mike, broke a window while playing baseball. They looked around to see if anyone had seen them. No one was in sight, except for Mike's little brother. They went over and offered him a candy bar not to tell. He refused it. "I'll give you my baseball," Mike said. "No," said his little brother. "Then what about my new glove?" Bob added. "No" said the little brother. "Well, what do you want?" they pleaded. With resoluteness, the little fellow said, "I wanna tell!"

It's hard to negotiate with a fundamentalist! That's what that little kid is heading for.

Fundamentalists have always scared me, because if you take anything to extremes you get in trouble. Good heavens,

Look at the Taliban. As a woman,
I find their kind of machismo
terrifying. They have women
in their ideal society covered
from head to toe - with only a
screen to see straight ahead
where they are going - forbidden
to work outside the home - even
when they are the sole support
of the family - reduced to begging
in the streets. Widows have been
reduced to the same status they
had 2-3000 years ago. That's
progress in a fundamentalist
world. Let's go back to the bad
old days. Scary, yes. But the
Southern Baptists would have us
go backward, as women, also -
Wives obey your husbands -
the husband is the head of the
household. Give up your job
and stay home & take care of your
children. Now, I admit in
upper class families that the
whole family could live on one
of their salaries & the other one

probably awful to stay home & take care of the kids. But I also read a statistic that scares me. In no place in the U.S. is it possible for a person making minimum wage to afford to be able to rent an apt. Both parents have to work. If ~~the~~ our home grown fundamentalists could make their edicts law what would poor people do. It's a dangerous thing we do when we take a 2-5000 year old document & tell people to live by it slavishly in the year 2001.

But there are other ways the Bible is misapplied & that's why I want to center on Timothy

This passage is often used to tell gay people that we are not living according to the Bible and how we ought to do it. It's the little brother in the

story at work. All God-inspired scripture is useful for teaching, the conviction of error, for correction, for training in righteousness that God's people may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Then they see about teaching, convicting, correcting us from their self-righteousness.

It doesn't work that way. You see the bible cannot be taken out of context - It must be taken as a whole.

Paul, at one place, says "all have sinned & come short of the glory of God." We are not to strive to be more like the fundamentalists but more like God. Sure God gets mad when we ~~go~~ don't get it & keep on making the same mistakes over & over.

It's a little like training a mule. Sometimes you want to take a 2x4 to its head, & I'm sure God feels the same way. But God did not set us up to be the little kid in the story we started we, we are not here on earth to tell one each other. I am not your conscience. You are not my conscience & you were not meant to be. My sins are between me & God. Your sins are between you & God. My needs are not the same as yours. Your needs are not the same as mine. Each of us one day will have to stand before God & explain our lives - but please remember this - Jesus is going to be your defense attorney! We are to hold up scripture to each other - yes - Mother Teresa had a saying which always ~~with~~ amused me. "When I see God, He's got a lot of explaining to do." + "God would

have a lot more friends if
God treated the ones he ^{does} have a little
bit better."

we must convict the sinner of his/her
sin -

Let me tell you a story of how
this works.

Ambrose of Milan was one of
the early figures of the church.
He was an intimate friend of
Theodosius, the Emperor, who was
a Christian, but a man of violent
temper. Ambrose never hesitated
to tell the emperor the truth. "Who
will dare tell you the truth if your
priest does not?" Theodosius
had appointed a close friend

Botanic as governor of Thessalonica.
He had imprisoned a famous
character for infamous conduct.
Characters were the movie stars
of their day & the people rose
up in anger & assassinated
Botanic. Theodosius was
furious. Ambrose pled to him

for mercy in his punishment, but Rufinus, his minister of state inflamed his anger & Theodosius sent out orders for a massacre of vengeance. Later he countermanded the order, but too late. People had filled the theater to see the charioteers, crammed to capacity the doors were sealed & Theodosius soldiers slaughtered more than 7000 in 3 hrs.

News came back to Milan & when Theodosius presented himself at the church service Sunday, Ambrose refused him admission - The Emperor pled for pardon. 8 months later he again came to church & again Ambrose refused him entry. In the end ~~ambrose~~ Theodosius, the Emperor of Rome had to lie prostrate to the penitents before he was allowed to worship in ambrose church again.

That's conviction. Would we dare tell the Pres of the US that he was wrong to wipe out a nation he

chase to annihilate No - but
we would tell one he had
slept in an intern. Do you
see the absurdity of it.

We must convict - but rightly -
we must rebuke, we must
exhort, but we must do
it with what the Greek says
is *macrothymia* - great spirit
which never grows irritated,
never despairs, never regards
any one as beyond redemption
or salvation.

What then is the X^{tian} life?
This is the season called Dominion time
or Kingdom tide & it deals in
living in the D^og G.

We are to be steady in all things.
1. a mental state free from all
anxiety or strife - every
faculty at full command, looking
at all the facts & all the
considerations deliberately -
we are not to be craggers -

stability is the mark of the Christian,
we are to accept whatever
suffering comes upon us.
(Remember this was written to
Christians under persecution.)
Christianity does cost something;
pay the price & grumbling & $\frac{1}{2}$
regret.

Christianity is ~~Good~~ News — tell it
like it is good news. Discipline
is not intended to make you
miserable it is meant to make
you strong.

Our ambition should be to
serve God & serve each other.

That is one of Paul's nutshells
is the Christian life. That approach
to scripture is a lot healthier than
than the fundamentalist saying
every word in the Bible is literally
true & you have to apply it
literally!

Remember us starting in the
condition of women under the Taliban?

In a lot of ways, that was life for a poor widow 2000 years ago. But one of those women had a legal case & small chance of justice - but she was persistent. Interestingly, Barclay says that the judge would find for a plaintiff if he was paid as little as a dish of meat. They were the paid magistrates of Rome or the Herodian judges never Jewish judges. Jewish judges were always 3 - one ~~for the~~ chosen by plaintiff, one by defendant & an independent chosen by the Sanhedrin.

Widows symbolized all the poor, the oppressed, the defenseless. Again Barclay says the word used for "exhausts me" can also mean "give me a black eye."

The Hion life is one of persistence. We do not get it all in one day.

We must keep on trying & trying
we must be continually in prayer -
But interestingly - it doesn't
mean badger God until God
gives in & gives us what we
want - it means if this no
God Judge would grant this
woman's cause How MUCH MORE
will God do for us? God is on
everyone's side - even ^{more} the side
of the oppressed.

You know God made a lot of
covenants in the O.T.

1. Noah
2. Abraham
3. Moses
4. David

Broken, all of them. Finally,
God says - Look, I'm going
to make a covenant you can't
break. I am making a covenant
that you shall be my people, I
will be your God. I will give
them one heart & one way that
they may be in awe of me

forever for their own good + the
good of their children. I will
make $\bar{c}$ them an everlasting
(unbreakable) covenant that
I will not turn away from
doing them good + I will put
the awe of me in their hearts
that they will not turn away
from me. I will rejoice in
doing them good + I will plant
them in a land of faithfulness
 $\bar{c}$ all my heart + $\bar{c}$ all my soul."

^{the fundamentalists}
Don't let ~~people~~ scare God
out of you. God has promised
God for you + I believe God
means what God says. Take
God as both a model + as
a guarantee. You are loved
you are saved, you are God's
women.

Date: 11/04/01

Sermon: Typhoon or Tailwind

Reference Text: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4
2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12; Luke 19:1-10

Let me start with two very short stories that will amuse you. Have you ever been broke - I mean really down financially? A family had sold everything possible to pay bills & put food on the table. Nevertheless a burglar broke in one evening when the family was gone. The family returned to find the door knocked off its hinges. "What did the burglars get?" asked the police. The head of the house shook his head and answered "Practice!"

or

Coming home from his little league game a very young boy swung open the front door very excited. Unable to attend the game, his father immediately wanted to know what had happened.

"So, how did you do?" he asked. "You'll never believe it," the youngster replied. "I was responsible for the winning run!" "Really?" asked his father.

"How did you do that?"

And the little boy said "I dropped the ball."

Why do bad things happen to good people. There's a theological name for that question. It is called Theodicy. And really it is a question about God. If God is all good & all powerful, why does God allow evil to happen?

I'm sure over the last two months we've all had questions like that. The first night we met after the planes hit the World Trade Center I tried to explain to a question that Jews, Moslems & Christians all worship the same God. We are all offshoots of the same religion — and that stattles us because of the huge animosity we feel for each other but it nevertheless is true. We all use the basic scripture of the first 5 books of the Bible as our common — that means that we use the law set down there as central to our ethical code — we believe in the same God. The different names we call God

only have their roots in what is called in linguistics a "vowel shift." When Jesus was on the cross[†] called on God, quoting one of the Psalms - He called out "Eli, Eli, Lama sabaothani." Jesus knew God as Eli or El or Yahweh. Eli & Allah are the same God - Just as Moslems name their sons Ibrahim & Jews call their Abraham - it's a vowel shift in two similar languages. Moslems even think of Jesus as a major prophet & read his teachings. They add the teachings of Mohammed who is their major prophet.

Jews, Christians, & Moslems - Three of the world's great religions at each other's throats. The Protestants & the Catholics in Ireland - share a central faith, but are at each other's throats. Why does God allow evil to happen - and especially allow evil to happen in God's name. If I had the answer, I would

write a book + make a whole lot of money, because it is a question that has been asked since the 8th century when Habakkuk ~~not~~ wrote his two laments + a prayer.

A second question he asks is where is god ~~of~~ when I am in trouble + I pray + get no answer.²

Have you ever been there?
Most of us have.

Why does God allow evil?
Why doesn't god answer my prayer
Why is justice not done.

Habakkuk was a deeply religious man. We know him as one of the prophets. It is thought that he was a professional prophet at the temple in Jerusalem. He lived at the same time as Jeremiah - expecting an attack

from the Babylonians whom he calls the Chaldeans. He is one of the prophets who ~~are~~ ^{wrote} ~~gotten~~ what we call "skeptical wisdom", because it questions what has been known religiously.

How many times have you heard people - very simplistically - say. Pray about it & God will give you an answer. So you pray. And you wait — and you wait — and you wait & God does not answer your prayer. That's where Habakkuk was. He was praying for the deliverance of his people. He was praying literally for their salvation - for evil not to come upon them in the form of this huge invading army & God does not answer his prayer.

God, I'm sick. Make the illness go away. And God does not answer.

At least not the way we expect.
~~In God's answer to Habakkuk~~
God does not seem to answer
Habakkuk's prayers & he has
what pastors call, "a crisis
of faith." Maybe there is no
~~God~~ - maybe God does not care
about my country - maybe God
doesn't care about me."

Habakkuk asks the questions we
all ask. How long should I
pray when no one seems to
be listening! Why should he plead
when God doesn't seem to want
to act.

We don't want to talk about those
times religiously.

AIDS, CANCER, TERMINAL ILLNESS.
Take it away! And we pray
and God does not answer.

WAR - Let us win the war, let
us not lose anyone. You

can't fight a war 5 casualties.
Millions upon millions died in
W.W.I crawling around in mud
in the trenches - being shot down
like dogs.

Six million Jews + many, many
more men on both sides died.
Germany in less than 50 years
lost two whole generations of
young men. We are told we
can wage a war + not lose
anyone.

And we pray - let them be
safe. Well maybe they won't
be. And it seems like God
is silent. Am I offending
your long held beliefs. God
always answers prayer.

I grew up in Normal Peale's
Church. My dad was once his
associate minister. And I
was fed the same stuff. "The
Power of Pastoral Prayer." But God
wasn't answering my prayers

and all of Dr. Peale's telling me
God would wasn't working.
the very first S. Bapt preacher—
a wise man by name J. D. Govey—
in the very first sermon I heard
said "God always answers prayers,
but some time the answer is
"No" "

What was the answer Habaikkuk
got.

"The vision awaits its time;
It hastens to the end—it will not lie
It it seems slow—wait for it;
It will surely come, it will
not delay.

Behold, the one whose soul
is not upright shall fail,
But the just shall live by faith.

Thessalonians adds some
words of wisdom to the
young Church under persecution

1. Keep your faith strong.

2. Increase your love.

3. Endure in constancy.

That requires explanation. The Greek word is *hypomene* which is usually translated endurance. But it means not only enduring the circumstances but mastering them. It accepts the blows of life but in accepting them transforms them into stepping stones to new achievement.

Norman Peale tells a story of being on a flight to Tokyo & having a chance to talk to the pilot. They were passing thru an area noted for bad weather. Dr. Peale asked the pilot what he did when he encountered a typhoon. The pilot replied that a typhoon could either help you or hurt you, depending on how you approach it. If you fly into certain parts of a typhoon or hurricane, the strong winds will destroy the plane. But if you can figure out the direction of the wind, then stay right on the ^{outer} edge of the storm, it can speed you along.

Safely to your destination. In fact,
a skillful pilot will get to the
destination early if he knows
how to ride the typhoon just right.
"The idea," said the pilot, "is to turn
a typhoon into a tail wind."

Hardships make us better as they
make us better.

Final word:

God Sometimes

You allow breakages, so you can rebuild.

You allow wounds, so you can heal.

You allow me to walk in darkness
so I can see your light.

You allow me to be perplexed, so I will
seek your truth.

You allow me to be empty, so you
can fill me.

You allow me to be lonely, so I
can see what a friend you are.

You allow me to learn hard things,
so I can be a gentle teacher.

You allow me to be void of feelings,
so I learn to walk by faith.

Date: 11/18/21
The Great Awakening
You take away my plans, to teach
me to live one day at a time
You allow me to suffer pain,
so I may be sympathetic to
the hurts of others.

You allow me to see the futility
of life, so that I will see
that every thing is less
compared to the excellency
of knowing X.

Tough times come. Hang in there.
There is no growth in hardship.
Trust God. Lean on your friends
And believe that all things do work
to the good for all who love God.
The just do live by faith.
~~Amen~~

And Zaccheus - Jesus can turn
anyone's life around. It's called
Grace. Amen

Date: 11/18/01

Sermon: The Best of us Nothing

Reference Text: Isaiah 65: 17-25, 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13
Luke 21: 5-19

We are coming to the end of the Christian year. For those of us who follow the lectionary and keep the cycle called "the Liturgical year," this is the next to last Sunday.

Next Sunday is referred to as "The Reign of X." or "Christ the King." ~~Both~~

This season has been called Kingdomtide or Dominiontide and refers to what life is like living with Christ having conquered the world.

If God were in control - if X had conquered the world, what would life be like. The Jews had that concept; the idea that this age we live in would one day end. Then a cataclysmic day would happen and the world as we know it would be over. Then would

came a time when God would reign. They referred to those three concepts as "The Present Age," "The Day of The Lord," and "The Age to Come." Isaiah's concept of that age was that it was an age of peace & plenty, a time of joy. Remembering all the years of being a people who had been conquered, he thought of it as a time when there would be no more war and there would be no servitude. People would plant their own gardens & eat the produce of them. Because there was no war, people would live to be a hundred. There would be no sick babies. God would answer requests before the people even voiced them — and even natural enemies like the wolf & the lamb would be at peace. Lions would become vegetarians — nothing would be hurt or destroyed. Can you imagine a world with no cancer, no disease, no HIV

no war in Afghanistan or anyone else. In my lifetime I can remember WWI, the Korean War, Viet Nam, the Gulf War, & now the war in Afghanistan. I'm ready for the Age to Come, when all the people of the world will live as neighbors. That's what the ancient Jews were looking toward. When Jesus told his followers he would return, they took all the concepts of the Idyllic "Age to come" & made them part of what it would be like when Jesus came back. Jesus' return would usher in the Age to come. And some of Paul's followers in Thessalonika ate it up. Paul preached that X would come within his lifetime. He expected X's return in 30 years. And the Thessalonians were ready to sit on a hillside and wait - just do nothing and wait for X to come back. Oops, says Paul. That's not what I

meant, we can't have people not working.

Work: I guess in the time to come nobody would have to work - we'd all sit under trees + the food would fall into our laps. I really don't think so.

Do you hate to go to work? The Washington Post sponsored a contest for the best excuse to give your boss for not working. The winner was, "If it's all the same to you, I wasn't ~~be~~ coming to work ~~today~~. The voices told me to clean all the guns today.

#2 I can't come in to work today because I'll be slatking my previous boss, who fired me for not showing up for work. Ok

#3. I'm stuck in the BP machine down at CVS.

#4 I just found out I was switched at birth.

Legally, I shouldn't come to work

knowing my employee records
now contain false information.
#5 the dog at my car Keys. We're
hitchhiking to the vet.

Work: We're not the first generation
to hate our jobs. Considering
that most of the early church
were from the working class or
were slaves, that wasn't
surprising. Paul has a great
answer "He who will not work
shall not eat."

Paul says, I could have come
among you & yet you wine &
dine me, put me up & give off
you - but I didn't. Paul was
a tentmaker and earned his living
making tents - that's not easy
work. His hands must have
bled often. But Rabbi's in the
ancient world were workers
like you & me. A Jewish saying
of the time was "He who does
not teach his son a trade

Teaches him to steal." Jewish law laid down that a rabbi must take no pay for teaching. He must have a trade & must satisfy his needs with the work of his hands. So rabbis were bakers, barbers, carpenters, masons, shopkeepers. They were sure that ~~a~~ scholars lost something when they became so academic & withdrawn from life they forgot how to work $\bar{c}$ their hands. Now, I believe that those who are called are to be paid for their labor. But as someone said last week - It's amazing to be paid to do what you love to do.

Paul would have been at home at Bethel. So would Jesus. A church in a home $\bar{c}$ people preaching who did not do it as their full time job was exactly what the early church was like.

Originally, the Christians went to the synagogues & taught there. By the time Thessalonians was written they had been thrown out of the synagogues and were dependent on the hospitality of Christians who opened their homes for worship & study. I have always been convinced that the reason Mary, Martha & Lazarus were so important in John's gospel was that a cell church met there, and the reason women were so important around Jesus was that he depended on their hospitality. I'm sure a church met at Timothy's house and his mother & grandmother had a part of it. But think, too, of all the churches that met underground whenever the Christians were persecuted.

Chinese churches have a long history of meeting in homes.

During the Boxer Rebellion in China the English & American missionaries were thrown out because English & Americans had been selling opium to the Chinese. The church in China died because indigenous Chinese churches sprang up in people's homes. A man named Watchman Nee kept those churches supplied with Christian teaching and when the communists came to power & exiled him, thousands of his followers fled to Taiwan with him and founded the Republic of China in Taiwan - probably the most Christianized country in the far East.

We have no reason to be ashamed to be a house church. It's where the church has always lived when it was persecuted. Russian & other orthodox churches lived during the communist regime by

retreating to homes & celebrating
communion there. It's a
long & honorable tradition, as
is butmaking.

We may complain about work
but as Christians, whatever we
work at we need to do well.

MLK Jr. said "If a person is
called to be a street-sweeper, he
should sweep streets as Michelangelo
painted or Beethoven composed music
or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He
should sweep streets so well that
all the hosts of heaven will
pause to say "Here lived a great
street sweeper who did his job well."

Mercedes Benz has the motto "Das
beste oder Nichts" the best or
nothing.

As Christians, God expects nothing
less than our best.

We're waiting for the return of Jesus.

I grew up in a church that taught that Jesus would not return until we Christians made the world fit for him to return to. That's a very different view than the one that presupposes a great battle & Christians just go poof & disappear.

There is so much work to be done. There is war & we need peace makers, There is famine & pestilence & we need scientists, there is injustice & we need justice makers. Jesus told that to his followers - before his death. He'd be back and until then they must be diligent - watch & work for the domain of God. So must we.

Amen,

Date: 12/23/01

Sermon: Given the Situation - What Would You ^{Do?}

Reference Text: Isaiah 7: 10-16 Romans 1: 1-7
Matthew 1: 18-25

Christmas is just about here. Most of us have gotten our xmas shopping done. Most of us - some of us haven't even started! We've given our lists to our lovers in hopes that we'll get what we want - at least some of it. We're a little like the little girl who wrote in her letter to Santa. Dear Santa: I wish you could leave ^{me} a doll under the tree for me - + a toy for my brother George. Then maybe he'll leave my stuff alone. Love Megan -

Christmas is full of surprises. Sometimes it's getting exactly what you want. Sometimes it's getting the last thing you would have thought of - but it's exactly right.

God was like that. Tell me what you want - God asks a day. What do you

want in the way of a sign —
Anything in the world - as high as
the heavens, as deep as hell itself.
Ask me for a sign that I will
restore Israel. But Ahaz fears
God - literally is afraid God is
testing him + refuses to answer.
And God gets impatient $\bar{c}$ him.

The God of the OT is very human.
God gets mad, God gets impatient,
sometimes it seems God gets
vindictive - but God always
relents. God is impatient $\bar{c}$ Ahaz.

do you think God ever gets
impatient $\bar{c}$ you. God gives you
things you need to do - and
you put it off. God sends someone
into your life - and all you see
are the flaws. God challenges
you - and you prefer your rut.
God challenged Ahaz - and Ahaz
backed down.

So God said "okay" here's
my sign of the Day of the Lord.
A young woman will bear a
child & call his name Emmanuel

He'll be a peaceful man - and
a peacemaker. He'll refuse to
do evil & do only good - and
before he grows to full adulthood,
the very nations you fear will
become nothing. And you will
know peace like you've never
known.

Signs are funny things in
the Bible. The rainbow is a
sign of a covenant between
God & Noah. The Egyptian
plagues were a sign God was
working for the Hebrews.
Jesus does "signs" - healings,
raising from the dead, to prove
the power of God.

The birth of X was a sign that
God was immanent - something
incredible was going to
happen. The church loses
sight when it gets all caught
up in the virgin birth - and
it all stems from translation⁺

translators. The Hebrew word for young woman is almah - which is what Isaiah used. Now "almah" doesn't tell us whether she is single or married, virgin or betrothed. It just means what it says - young woman. Betulah is the word for virgin & Isaiah doesn't say or imply that. When the OT was translated into Greek the translator chose to use the word parthenos to translate almah - and we've been stuck with it ever since. By the strokes of a pen we've been told that the mother of Jesus was a virgin in answer to prophecy. Interesting isn't it, how much power there is in a word. Is every word in the Bible true? It may be. Then again it may all depend on the translation.

Anyway - Amos gets his sign -

but so do we. A young woman
will be a child. A betrothed young
woman, in this case.

On Xmas night, the history channel
is going to present a program
that supposes that Mary may
have been raped by a Roman
soldier which presented Joseph
in a dilemma. Does he stone &
kill her — which is what the
law demands — when the rape
was not her fault but the act
of an oppressor & does he make
the oppression worse by blaming
the victim — or does he marry
her and take on a child who
is not his. A betrothal was
a legal state — it had to be
ended in a divorce. Was
Joseph inclined to do that &
call attention to her infidelity.
Apparently not.

In France, which has certainly
seen its share of tragedies

expectant mothers are greeted with the comment, "I congratulate you on your hope."

Jesus, the child Mary was carrying was the hope of the world. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Yashua or Yeshua. It means ~~Yehovah~~ Yahuweh is salvation.

Matthew tells us of Joseph's dilemma - Do I divorce her - even in a way that does not humiliate her or don't I. And God gives a sign. God sends an angel. Don't do it. This is the work of HS. This is the answer to the prophecy this is Emmanuel. "God with us" And he married her & she bore a son whom he called Jesus "Yahuweh is salvation."

The Xmas message is full of surprises. Joseph was certainly surprised by his dilemma.

Max Lucado says that Joseph is "caught between what God says & what makes sense." Sometimes what God says does not make sense. Maybe you are there. You want to believe that God knows you & cares about you. You want to believe that you are not alone in this world. You are confused by the signs of God in your life. Society tells you one thing - like Joseph - and God tells you something radically different. It doesn't add up. It's too good to be true. We are all standing in Joseph's shoes. Can you imagine Joseph. Mary tells him that she was chosen by God to bear this child & that the other parent is the H.S. Sure.

Senator Joseph Mc Carthy - the

infamous Communist & gay
hater — who surrounded himself
w/ gay associates — sometimes we
hate the Thing we love — was asked
to comment on a startling
allegation that had been made
"Why" McCarthy sputtered in all
seriousness, "That's the most unheard
of thing I've ever heard of."

So it was for Joseph — and
sometimes for us too.

Why would God choose an obscure
peasant girl to bear the Messiah?
Wasn't the Messiah supposed to be
a warrior king, a conquering hero?
Where does a baby fit into all
this. Maybe God wanted to be
user-friendly. God did not
want us to fear ~~him~~, like Ahay —
but to want to be close. No
other religion on earth
claims that God gave up
an exalted status in order to
become weak & vulnerable.

And no other God claims to come to where we are except Jesus.

An old woman was nearing death & wanted to leave her estate to someone who would use it for worthy causes. So she set out to see a popular televangelist whose program she enjoyed. But the woman's eyes nearly popped out of her head when she approached the TV evangelist's home. It was more luxurious than anything she could have imagined. After speaking to the televangelist for a few moments she finally spoke up.

"I was going to will my property to you when I die, but now I'm not so sure. After seeing your house, I think you're spending too much on yourself."

The TV evangelist, with a gleaming smile, replied, "But all these

wonderful things were brought
for God's glory. You wouldn't
expect him to live in a barn,
would you?" Duh

Sometimes when we are trying
to explain the apparent conflict
between the words "gay" & "Xtian"
we find ourselves wondering
who has it right & who has
it wrong. Is Christianity best
explained by a Mother Teresa
or a Mother Angelica. Does
Jesus deserve a cathedral or
a house church. Jesus was
born in an obscure place, from
an obscure family — and yet
we remember him in cathedrals.
Are we missing something?

Joseph's dilemma also reminds
of why Jesus came. Not for
the wealthy & powerful — But
for the poor, downcast & outcast.
Jesus plan was to give up his
own glory in order to put on

"humanity" He came to see life through human eyes in order to convince us to see ourselves through his eyes.

Jesus didn't come to fight the Romans — although eventually Christianity would overpower Rome. Jesus didn't come to reign in power + might, not to set up a kingdom by power. He came to set up an eternal ~~dominion~~ ^{reign} of justice + righteousness. Jesus did nothing by power or force but everything by the power of love. He comes to where we are and like the prophecy in Isaiah — he comes doing good + leaving evil behind.

You + I need that kind of God — one we're not afraid of. The powerless babe who shows us the power of love. One who comes to where we are. Immanuel — God with us. Merry Xmas.

"Humanity" he came to see life
through human eyes in order to
convince us to see ourselves
through his eyes.

Jesus didn't come to take the
human - all right, eventually
that's what we ought to know.
Jesus didn't come to keep us
from a higher, but to see up a
higher by power, he came
to see up an eternal ~~eternity~~
of future & present. Jesus
did nothing by power of force
but everything by the power of
love. He came to induce us
and like the prophet in
Isaiah - he came to induce us
& leaving us behind.

Now I see the kind of God -
the one we are afraid of. The
powerful God who makes us
the power of love. One who comes
to induce us on, to induce us on.
Merry Christmas.

Date: 4/6/02

Sermon: the rest of the story

Reference Text: Isaiah 40:1-6, Eph 3:1-12
Matthew 2:1-12

Well, the New Year is here. Does it seem that time is passing more quickly than it used to? It seems only yesterday we were making plans for the millenium and we were thinking about American terrorists stockpiling weapons for some catastrophic break down of the system, & all that seems ancient history in light of 9/11/01. How silly our resolutions to lose weight, save money, spend more time & our loved ones seem when we sit on the brink of what could be a religious war between Moslem nations and Christian nations and sometimes we feel very small & personally powerless. I feel very selfish ~~that~~ when I thank God my sons are too old for military

service and thank God that neither of my sons have had to serve in the military & face death in that way.

Beginnings & endings are interesting things. Today is the end of the Christmas season. That may be strange for a lot of you, who have already taken down your trees, put away the ornaments, but all around the world today is Christmas for many youngsters - today is the day they receive their gifts.

It interested me this morning that today the American military is handing out "winter kits" in Afghanistan. They contain two winter jackets, two bags of coal & two blankets. Some kids are glad to get coal in their Xmas stockings!

My grandmother is Hungarian and used to keep many of the old world ways. January 6th - for her - was always "little Christmas" - Epiphany and as children we would ~~not~~ ^{not} stay while she told the Biblical story of the magi & always followed it with the story of Babushka.

Some of you may remember Missy telling the Babushka story as a children's moment. The 3 wise men pass through her village on the way to visit the infant Jesus. It is a snowy night and they seek shelter. She has very little but shares what she has. The next morning they invite her to join them on their search for the newborn King - but her little hut is warm & the cat is purring by the fire and it is still snowing & she does not go. But later she thinks how wonderful it would be to kneel before one who will one day be the King of the world - and she sets out to follow. ~~Here~~ Her question as she goes from village to village is "have you seen three kings who search for a baby prince?" And always the answer is "they have been here, but have travelled further on." And so she leaves, eternally wandering & searching for the X child, but

at each house where she stops where
there is a child she leaves a gold
coin or a little toy - for "his sake."
And so today many children will receive
their gifts "for his sake."

"Arise shine for your light has come!"
Far far too long our people have
been hiding in the shadows -
afraid to shine, for fear someone
would notice them. Years ago,
Eric Berne wrote a book called
Games People Play. He was a psychiatrist
and saw first hand the damage
some of our games could do to
us. Upstairs - domestic violence -
passing the blame - "You made me do
it." Dr. Mergatroid - our fantasy
lover who is so far beyond our
possibility of being real - The
Xena crush, for example. Our ~~unwillingness~~
unwillingness to stum - Broken leg."
"What do you expect of me, I'm
(name your own minority) a woman,
a black, a gay, come from a broken
home, have limited resources,

(~~name~~ your own excuse). And that's what they are - excuses - not reasons. It is why I am constantly telling people to go back to school. "I'm too old" You're going to get older & you can be older with or without a degree. Five years from now you will be five years older & you could have a degree. Nothing stops you but you. "Crisis, shine your light has come." We think of all the excuses. I'm too old. I was in divinity school in my 50's. I don't have the money. That's what Pell grants are for. I'm not smart enough. That's what God is for. You are plenty smart - and going to school or trying something you've never done - will make you smarter. Stop playing broken leg.

God has a habit of using that which is flawed & weak to reveal the divine perfection & strength. Over & over the people of Israel failed to be faithful to God who had brought them out of slavery.

Yet God never abandoned them, in spite of their failures. Through Isaiah, God announced again the promise that light would shine in their darkness + out of their want would come plenty.

God continues to use imperfect tools. A wicked, conniving king, uncertain reekers, and a new born baby are some of the means God chooses to bring the light of love into a dark world. As we seek to be faithful, God's use of weakness to reveal strength encourages us to press on even when conditions are not what we would choose.

Have you made any resolutions for this new year? There's a fellow who decided he would only make resolutions he could keep. He resolved to gain weight, stop exercising, read less + watch more TV, to procrastinate more,

to quit giving money to charity,
not to date any member of the cast
of Baywatch (or Xena), & to never
make New Year's resolutions again.

Why torture yourself & guilt when
you're not going to keep your
resolutions for more than a week
anyway.

We don't need a resolution, but a
revolution. We need a turning
point in our lives. Like the wise
men of old we need to catch a
glimpse of a guiding light & we
need to follow that light to a
new life in X.

We want everything to be perfect - so
there is no possibility of failure.
I learned a long time ago that
that was alcoholic thinking. We
hide our own fear of failure by
not trying. The truth is no one
is perfect.

The problem of looking for perfection is that sometimes we decide that we'd rather have nothing than settle for something that is less than perfect. That's what happens to our New Year's resolutions.

But sometimes it's the same in our spiritual lives. Someone invites us to church & we go with them once. When they don't continue to invite us, we don't go. Unless the situation is perfect - unless people are perfect we won't commit ourselves. No one is perfect. You are not, I am not. No one is - not even your fantasy lover.

We're afraid we can't cut it. What can I do about world hunger, institutional racism, urban decay, gay rights? If we can't make it a perfect world then we won't do anything. We become so discouraged by not

being able to achieve perfection
that we decide to do nothing

But is that the example God has
set for us? Is that the life we
are called to as Christians? Perfect or
nothing? Is that how God
has acted in our world?

We are celebrating the coming of X
into the world. Think about the
time God chose - the little nation
of Israel was not ideal. If
history seems unstable now, surely
the same must be said of Palestine
in the time of Jesus. The nation
was occupied by Rome. They were
living on the edge of a volcano
ready to erupt at any time. There
was no peace on earth & the
Romans were hardly friends &
Goodwill.

But if God had waited - we might
never have known Jesus or known
the love of an incarnate God

If God had waited until the world
had rid itself of selfishness & greed.
If God had said "I will not send
my child into such a situation - we
would still be in hope. The truth
is there is no ideal time.

Today we celebrate Epiphany. We
remember the Magi. They didn't wait
for a perfect time - neither can we.
God can use us now, God can
use us as we are - imperfect tho' we are.
Think of the disciples - how
imperfect they were - but X used Them.

In Epiphany, we remember that X is
the savior of all people - not just
the Jews. Paul reminds us that
X came for everyone. Jews, Gentile,
Samaritan, Roman soldiers, a
business woman from Asia, a
lecturer from Egypt, peddlars,
fortune tellers, a tent maker, politicians
& beggars. None perfect - but all
ready to be used by God.

The time is not ideal, you are not perfect, the church is not perfect. We may not be able to keep all our resolutions, but we can try — & try again. There is a God of second, third & 70th chances. We can come to be fed and go out & do our little here to change the world — & maybe we can help make it a more love-filled place.

We're not perfect. It's not perfect. Love is not perfect. X is perfect — God is perfect. We are less than ideal, but in God's help — maybe God can use the imperfect — us — to do great things. God is willing are we? Amen.

Hospitality or a Cup of Cold Water
Leviticus 2:4-13, Hebrews 13:1-8
Luke 14-1, 7-14

A commercial airline pilot on one occasion made a particularly bad landing. The wheels of the big jet hit the runway & a jarring thud. The airline had a policy that after such an occurrence the pilot was required to stand at the door while the passengers exited. He was to give them each a big smile and and say "Thanks for flying & us today." In light of his bad landing, he had a hard time looking the passengers in the ~~face~~^{eyes} thinking that someone might have a smart comment, but no one seemed annoyed.

Finally everyone had gotten off the plane except one little old lady waiting & a cane. She approached the pilot & asked "Sonny, mind if I ask you a question?" Why no ma'am - what is it? Said the pilot bravely -

"Did we land? Or were we
shot down?"

We've all had days like that
when we felt we were
shot down. Even Jesus. Our
Gospel lesson tells us about a
day when the pharisees were
trying to shoot Jesus down -
they did a lot of that!

Hospitality was a Biblical
trait. I know when I debate
with people who oppose gays
they often bring up the Sodom
& Gomorrah story & they laugh
when I say they have it all
wrong - that it's not a
story about homosexuality, it's
a story about hospitality.
Actually, there are two stories
& they both begin alike. Two
messengers come from God -
Angels, if you must - who
are offered hospitality. Abraham
feeds & shelters the messengers.

And they bless him & make ^{children of} ~~him~~ ^{Abraham} a promise that God would give him not just one descendant but as many as the stars in the sky. In the very next chapter the messengers come to Lot who feeds them and settles them in for the night & a group come & attack them. And the village is cursed. Blessings & cursings in exchange for hospitality. The trouble $\bar{c}$ most people is that they don't read the Bible — they read a verse & decide what that verse means. They are too lazy mentally to deal $\bar{c}$ more than one verse at a time.

Hospitality in Abraham's time was a necessity. There were no McDonalds or Chinese, Mexican & Italian restaurants on every corner & certainly Hilton Hotels hadn't been invented. In the larger cities

there were inns but they had a bad reputation. The Greeks deplored Hospitality for money; unkeeping to them was an unnatural idea. In a play called The Frogs by Aristophanes Dionysius asks Heracles when they are discussing finding lodging if he knows one where there are the fewest fleas.

Plato speaks of an unkeeper holding travelers for ransom. And it is significant that Rahab the prostitute who took in Joshua's scouts kept an inn. A person who was not felt worth much, was fit to keep an inn or run a brothel - putting both occupations on the same level.

Abraham, on the other hand, in a rabbinic legend, is said to have pitched his tent at a crossroad & raised the tent flaps on all four sides so that he could see a traveler

coming in all directions & offer hospitality.

By Jesus time, it was not too different. Sabbath day hospitality offered people an opportunity to hear more from the speaker of the day — to question & learn. Banquets & meals provided a casual atmosphere for philosophers & teachers to impart their wisdom. There was nothing unusual about Jesus being asked home after service. More of the time the host was sincere. Unfortunately, there were times when especially the Pharisees wanted to shoot him down. That was what was going on in Luke — but Jesus turned it into a teachable moment. First he heals a man — kidney failure — the Bible calls it by the old name of dropsy — and then he teaches some ethics about

party giving. (Not to mention some etiquette.) You may not realize it from my own manners but Emily Post was part of my mother's family - a great great aunt. So we were very carefully taught our manners by a grandmother who was very regal & deplored the manners of a couple of N.Y. kids who would rather learn how to play stickball in the street than learn how to eat an orange c a spoon, useless knowledge these days.

Jesus teaches about humility - putting yourself last & hospitably putting your guests first - and what guests! Jesus doesn't suggest taking the leftovers out to the edge of town & giving them to the poor & disabled - what Jesus says is "you invite your relatives, your friends, your brothers & sisters or your rich neighbors because

you are sure they will invite you back and you receive repayment. But I say when you give a feast invite the poor, the maimed, the lame & the blind. Then you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will receive repayment at the resurrection of the righteous.

This is known as Jesus' radical hospitality. Give because you cannot help but give the way God gives.

Hebrews is on the same wavelength - giving hospitality in an even more practical way. By this time there were itinerant preachers & teachers on the road spreading Christianity. Apostles if you will & they often had no home - following the pattern of Jesus. Slaves had no homes of their own. There

were many Christians on the road fleeing persecution & they were exhorted to take them in, shelter them & feed them. Repayment — stars in your crown!

Shirley & I like the story of the ^{weathy} woman who went to heaven & was met by St. Peter. She was welcomed & Peter told her he was to be her guide to her new home. They began by walking down a street where there were numerous mansions. "Which one is mine," "Oh none of these." They went on a little further until there were more modest homes. "Which one is mine?" "Oh, none of these." Finally they got to some little paper board & corrugated tin shacks and Peter said "Now this is yours." "Mine?" "Yes," said Peter. "This is all the material you sent up."

We certainly are not under attack for our faith. We may be for our sexuality & we may have to defend the idea that we are gay AND Christian, but we likely won't go to jail for it unless we become radical Xtrans like Souf force & believe again in civil disobedience, but we can certainly be welcoming to our own & welcoming & ~~to~~ inviting to strangers. While you may not think of yourself as an angel you may look an awful lot like one to someone else whom you share your story with.

Sometime around 1608 - more than a decade before the Pilgrims arrived - a group of English traders sailed into what today is Plymouth Mass. When the trusting Wampanoag ^{Indians} ~~Indians~~ came out to trade, the traders took them captive, transported

them to Spain & sold them as slaves. One of these unfortunate captives was a boy named Squanto, who was bought by a Spanish monk who treated him well & taught him the Latin faith. Squanto eventually made his way to England & worked in the stable of a man named John Slaney. Slaney sympathized w/ Squanto's desire to return home & promised to put him on the first vessel bound for America.

It wasn't until 1618 that a ship was found. After ~~an~~ decade of exile & heartbreak, Squanto was on his way home. But when he arrived, he found his whole village had been wiped out by an epidemic. He could have hated, been bitter, become a killer of whites as many natives had to when their land was overrun. But Squanto took literally Jesus' commands to do well by those who despise you.

use you. When the Pilgrims arrived they were startled to be met by a native who spoke English. According to the diary of Jas. Bradford "Squanto became an instrument of peace from God for our good. He showed us how to plant corn, where to take fish & procure other commodities.

He was our pilot to bring us to unknown places for our profit & never left us till he died.

Squanto even bequeathed his possessions to the Pilgrims as "remembrances of his love."

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers - for thereby you may entertain angels unaware,

There are flesh & blood angels who can bring good things to our lives if we will give them an opportunity. Kindness to strangers is how we open ourselves to that possibility. And who knows

the stranger may think that
he or she has met an
angel.

Be one. Matthew says everyone
deserves a cup Amen.
of cold water.



Hosea 2:14-20

Mark 2:

II corinthians 3:1-6

13-22

Letters from the Heart

How many of you have ever had to go job hunting? Horrible experience, isn't it. We all fear rejection and that's one place where we almost expect it.

Here are some experiences interviewers have had w/ job seekers:

a balding candidate abruptly excused himself and returned to the office a few moments later wearing a hairpiece.

An applicant wore a walkman and said she could listen to me and the music at the same time.

Another stated that, if he were hired, he would demonstrate his loyalty by having the corporate logo tattooed on his forearm.

One interrupted to call his

therapist for advice on how to answer some of the questions.

"When I asked him about his hobbies he got up and began tap dancing around the office."

One said he wasn't interested because the position paid too much.

Finally, one "asked who the lovely babe was, pointing to a picture ^{on} ~~of the~~ interviewer's desk when he said it was his wife, the applicant asked if she was home now and wanted the home phone #. They called Security.

The subject today seems to be employment. Conditions of hiring, call, & letters of recommendation.

Three things came to mind as I read for this sermon.
God hires us on the basis

of our conduct, our
countenance and our
confession.

Hasea was taken on as a
prophet on the basis of his
conduct. God gave him very
explicit instructions. He was
to marry a harlot - a prostitute
possibly even a temple prostitute.
They were to have children - 3 -
Jezeel, Lo-rukama (not pitied)
lo-ammi (not my people). Then
she was to leave him & return
to her previous profession and
he was to go after her & love
her back to him and when she
returned, they were to be betrothed
in righteousness & justice, in
steadfast love, & in mercy. And
in that day God will change
the names of "not pitied" to
"pitied" & "not my people" to
"You are my people" & They
will answer "You are my
God."

Now, I don't know about you,
but I don't remember any of
my preachers out side of me
ever preaching on Hosea.

First of all - Gomer - Hosea's
wife was a sex worker.
under idolatrous conditions -
and God instructed Hosea to
love her, woo her, & have
children by her. This is all
a parable of God's love for
Israel, a people who con-
stantly went off after the
gods of Canaan - which, we
must admit were a lot more
fun than puritanical Yahweh.
You got to have sex & temple
prostitutes male or female,
dance around on the mountain
tops ^{on feast days} & eat raisin cakes - cakes
for the queen of heaven.

That's a lot different from
thou shalt have no gods before
me; thou shalt not commit
adultery and remember the
sabbath day to keep it holy.

And most of us will take
raisin cakes over matzoh
any day.

But Hosea did as he was
commanded and he loved as
God instructed him and God
said "See; that's what my
love for my people is like.
You can run off to foreign
gods, live it up, make a
mockery of me — and I
will love you anyway."

In MCC that's the God I came
to know — a God who could
love me even after I turned
away and who would take
me back & love me no
matter how bad I thought I
was because God could see
something redeemable in me
even when I couldn't see
it. And that's the picture
of God I have always tried
to present.

God hurts when we don't
come home and God hurts
for us when we hurt ourselves.
Peter, in the new testament will
refer to this passage when
he says "you who were once
not a people are now the
people of God, you who were
once $\bar{c}$ mercy have now
found mercy."

Secondly - we ~~show~~ ^{communicate} our
faith by our countenance -
how we appear. Beauty, they say,
is only skin deep, but you can
tell a lot ~~by~~ about a person's
relationship $\bar{c}$ God by their
appearance. You can tell by
looking at some people that
they have had a lot of
disappointments. Some look
hard. Some downright mean.
We communicate where we
are spiritually simply by our
enthusiasm for life.
Enthusiasm is a wonderful

word. It is from two greek words EN and Theos - In God. If we are truly in God we will be enthusiastic. Dale Carnegie used as one of his principles "If you act enthusiastic, you will feel enthusiastic."

Whenever child star Shirley Temple got up to perform, her mother would always say "Sparkle, Shirley". I wonder sometimes if the HS does not whisper that in our ear when it comes time to communicate our love for God.

Was there something about Levi's countenance that let Jesus know that this tax collector was one who had a zeal for living + a zeal for God? I wonder how many of us show our zeal for God - not a pious, platitudinous offering of band aids for the world's

wounds, but a real healing presence that let's other's truly know the depth of God's love for them. An old friend of ours said you could tell by the glow on some people's faces - "they took as though they'd eaten phosphorus for breakfast."

Third, we communicate our love for God by our confession - by what we say. Paul wanted to be taken for his word. He wanted the people to believe him - not because he had letters of recommendation from their friends, but purely because God had entrusted him with a message.

In Paul's time, strangers, especially philosophers, theologians & teachers, often carried letters of recommendation to prove their credentials & to ease their introduction into a new society. Paul had no such

letter of recommendation. Instead he claimed the transformed lives of the Corinthian believers as his living letters of recommendation. He didn't need ink for this writing - it was done by the HS "writing" its message on their hearts.

I would like to think that each one of us is a letter of recommendation for X. Living letters. Those of us who have truly known X and the kind of God Hosea preached communicating daily to those around us that X lives in our hearts. I hope - like Paul - that many of you are my living letters showing that X, our God & the HS lives in you lives. I hope you are a living letter ^{to yr family & friends} to our community of what you have learned in this church.

I keep reminding you that the D of G is a party and once more

in today's scripture Jesus is at a party; this time it is for a party of outcasts, taxgatherers & publicans and Jesus is asked why his disciples don't fast as the disciples of the Pharisees & John fast and Jesus says because we're as happy as tho we were at a wedding feast & I am the bridegroom. As long as I am here we're gonna party - when I am gone there will be plenty of time to fast.

When you have Jesus it's time to party!

Let me tell you a story;

Once there was a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his backpack - Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer, and he started on his journey. When he had gone about

three blocks, he met an old woman. She was sitting in the park, staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her & opened his backpack. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her a twinkie. She gratefully accepted and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a root beer. Once again she smiled at him. The boy was delighted. They sat there all afternoon eating & drinking - and smiling - yet they never said a word. As it grew dark, the little boy realized how tired he was & he got up to leave. Before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to her and gave her a hug. She gave him ~~the~~ ^{her} biggest smile ever. When the boy opened

the door to his own home a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch - God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old woman, radiant in joy, returned to her home. Her neighbor was stunned by the look of peace on her face, and she asked, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" She replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park - God." But before her neighbor responded, she added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected."

The D of G is a party! Root beer and Twinkies maybe. Maybe

Babette's feast — Jesus eating
the outcasts, the wedding party
at Cana or a friend praying
with you at the altar. It's all
part of the same party. We've
been invited — every one of us
and as we return to our home
I hope someone will ask us
"What did you do today that
made you so happy." I had
lunch with God — and I'm
surprised how many faces
God has — every one of yours."

Thank you for the party and may
God richly bless you beyond
your wildest dreams and
may we meet again ~~in the~~
and share God's love over a
party.

Amen —

Robert's face - faint smiling
to celebrate the wedding party
as there are no friends
with you at the house. It's all
part of the same party. But we
have invited - every one of us
and even return to our house
I hope everyone will see us
"What did you do today that
made you so happy. I had
lunch & this - one 3rd
surprise has many faces
the first - every one of yours"
I'm sure of that
I think you for the party and very
that night when you
your wish that someone
many we meet again
and when the last one
party.

Once there was a little girl named Wendy who was always fascinated by a certain feature in her church. Behind the pulpit was a wooden door. It was closed at all times. Wendy imagined that Jesus lived in the room ~~behind~~ behind that door, and that the pastor would go back there to talk to Jesus occasionally. That's how the preacher knew what to preach about on Sunday. It felt ^{so} good to have Jesus so nearby, Wendy would never have thought about knocking on the door or opening it, but she liked knowing that Jesus was there in case some emergency came up.

One day, Wendy noticed the door was open. She held her breath as she reached for the door and stepped into the secret room. But all she saw

were red chair robes and church decorations. Jesus wasn't there. In her child's mind, Wendy wondered if Jesus had left her church for some reason. If Jesus wasn't in her church, where was he?

All of us yearn to see God. We yearn to know that God is $\bar{c}$ us, that God knows us, understands us, helps us.

It's really what church is all about. Salomon, the ruler - the heir of David - had learned that from his father.

Because David had committed Adultery $\bar{c}$ Bathsheba + had Uriah killed, God had taken from David the privilege of building a sanctuary to God. But Solomon his favored son would have that privilege. And so Solomon built the temple and the day came to dedicate it.

The Ark of the Covenant - the symbol of the agreement between God & the people of Israel - was being brought into The Holy of holies - the inner sanctum of the temple. The ark was set under the wings of the cherubim - winged mythical creatures whose presence always signified the presence of the God. The people of Israel know that as long as the ark was there God dwelt $\bar{c}$ them. God had promised always to be their God & never to abandon them.

Solomon then prays a prayer of blessing & dedication of the sanctuary. His prayer reminds us of some very important concepts of what a church is.

1. It is a place where we & those we love meet $\bar{c}$ God.

We all have families - some good - some bad. Most of us in our communities also have our families of choice. Robt. Cochrane once defined family as "two or ~~three~~ ^{more} people who care unconditionally for one another & share in the collective health & security of the unit as well as supporting & helping each other to secure his or her full potential & achieve personal fulfillment." That's a church! That's why we call it a sanctuary. It's a safe place where all of us can grow to our full potential under the watchful care of our Parenting God.

2. The Sanctuary is a place of promise.

3. Solomon reminds the people through his prayer that God's promise offers unfailing love for all. God's promise has four basic premises.

1. God's justice & goodness,

which will not allow God to deceive us.

- God's grace + goodness, which will not allow God to forget us.
- God's truth and honesty, which will not allow God to change.
- God's power + might which will not allow God to fail.

Salomon's hope lies in the God of forever.

The sanctuary is a place of ^{prayer +} praise.

The unmistakable mark of a ~~living~~ living faith is a readiness to praise. Salomon knew that the surroundings of the temple were the ideal place to praise God.

That's what Church is - a place where we can praise God. Worship should be the church as a family coming together to praise our God. Someone once said that "worship is an inward reverence as the

spirit bows down in the presence of a holy God, an awesome dependence on God, in a ^{Solemn} consciousness of the divine in revelation.

2. Praise in miracle. Sometimes we don't understand how God does it - but God works miracles in our lives - sometimes small - sometimes huge. Sometimes we just know the awesomeness & power & the inherent ability of God to be absolutely "other" than what we are; The power of God to be supernatural.

Praise in respect. In our age of familiarity, we tend to view God as "the man upstairs" or the "big guy in the sky." No. Never forget that as human beings, we can never fully understand God. All we can do is make similes "God is like..." We can never know fully - until we meet God finally - exactly what God is. Remember that we do not

know God's name, all we have is God's description of God's self. "I am who I am becoming." The rest is conjecture and limited by our humanness. A friend of mine introduced me to a Zen proverb years ago. "The finger pointing at the moon is not the moon." The names + terms we have for God are not God - they are merely fingers pointing us to God. We must not lose our respect for the otherness + unknowability of God at the same time that we remember God's closeness to us + God's availability to us. ~~God~~

But there's another thing a church is - it's a place of preparation.

Wouldn't life be wonderful if nothing bad ever happened? It's always interesting to me to find

but how people react when something bad happens in their lives. I'm a Christian - somehow I thought it was all going to be wonderful when I found Jesus. Just think for a moment about what happened to Jesus! I have a friend who is blind. Michael used to be an MCC minister until he found out that what God was really calling him to was a ministry among the severely handicapped in helping them to get an education & that's what he does today. He counsels handicapped students at the R. I. C. Michael said that when he first became blind he asked "why me - then why not me? & ?" Finally, what can I learn from what I'm going thru.

In the epistle, Paul is turning our attention from his good words about a good & loving God & how gracious & loving

life in the church can be
to the warfare it will be
subjected to from without.
"There's evil" he says
simply. It's out there, it will
attack you. Be ready. Arm
yourself. Don't imagine that
you will have a special
immunity to it. We may
not feel that we're under
direct attack a lot of the
time but let your guard down
sometime in an unfamiliar
setting + you + I know what
it means to us as gay people.
Paul is talking about
spiritual battles, not battles
of flesh + blood. Those of us
who live in the world know
just how often we are
attacked purely for something
we can't change, + we know
people who are turning them-
selves inside out trying to
change. Paul says, you'd
better be armed. You'd better
be ready.

That too, is what a church is. It's a place to get ourselves ready to deal c the world.

Paul, chained to a Roman guard, uses the Roman soldier's uniform to show the Christian how to prepare for the world outside the doors of the church. Paul does not ask us to be o the attack. Interestingly, Paul tells us how to get ready & then says "after we are armed we should" be able to withstand o that evil day - and having done everything, to stand firm."

Paul was talking to Christians who, under Nero, the Roman emperor, might be asked to give their lives & he was telling them h they could stand firm. There was not a battle in which they were to attack. They were to win by just standing firm & holding their ground. You

and I will fight many battles like that which we will win by just standing firm & holding our ground.

The place where we learn this is The church.

Remember Wendy - whom I started with? Who was afraid that Jesus had left the church because he wasn't in the room behind the altar.

Jesus was beginning his long walk to the cross when he speaks to the disciples. Jesus was trying to tell the disciples that they had to keep feeding on him even if he was not going to be with them in the flesh — they would still have his flesh to feed on — the communion supper. As he spoke, he realized that not all of the crowd

following him would be there
with him always & he turns
to those closest to him and
asks — would they want to
go away also? Peter answers
him, "Lord, ^{to whom} ~~where~~ would we
go? You have the words of
eternal life."

Years ago, when I had
discovered feminism & MCC
all within a couple of weeks
of each other & had committed
myself to MCC & becoming
clergy — women friends of mine
would ask incredulously why
I would want to stay in the
church that last vestige of
the patriarchy; which even
today casts us out as gay people
& where the So. Baptist church
states unequivocally that
women should not be pastors —
why hang in there. Why not
leave it. These words hung
in my memory. To whom would
I go? You have the words of

eternal life. Somewhere, there's a gay little meedy or her little brother who look into the room called "church" & find it full of old choir robes & church decorations. They think Jesus is gone. We know better. Most of us opened that door & found that Jesus wasn't in the church of our origin - but we didn't turn away - because we knew there wasn't any place else to go. What we had to do was be Jesus so people would know that Jesus isn't holed up in a room at the church. Jesus is the church - the people of God & if we can convince people that Jesus is out here with us praying & praising, preparing & doing battle they won't have to look somewhere else. Where else could they go - Jesus is here & Jesus has the words of eternal life.

Amen.

eternal life. Some where, there's
a good little bundle in the little
box that was taken into the
room called "Church" & find
it free of all sin, robes & church
decorations. They think Jesus
is gone. The Roman Catholic Mass
of new offers the show of
Jesus that Jesus wasn't in
the Church of sin, origin - but
we didn't turn away - because
we know there was't any
place else to go. What we
had to do was be Jesus so
people would know that Jesus
wasn't hiding in a room at
the church. Jesus is the church -
the people of God & of the son
of man. People that Jesus is out
there with, preparing & providing
preparing & being better than
won't time to look somewhere
else. Father also says that
Jesus is here & Jesus has the
word of eternal life.

How many of you have ever met a woman $\bar{c}$ an attitude? Today's scripture introduces us to just such a woman.

And speaking of women $\bar{c}$ attitudes someone mailed me some women's bumper stickers I thought you might enjoy.

"If they don't have chocolate in heaven, I am not going."

If you want breakfast in bed,
Sleep in the kitchen.

Dinner is ready when the smoke alarm goes off!

I'm out of estrogen - and I have a gun!

Of course I don't look busy. I did it right the first time.

^{finally}
Warning: I have an attitude

and I know how to use
it — which our scriptures
sister certainly displayed.

oh yes -

And the one I always told
John & Andy:

Don't start w me - you won't
win.

Thanks for having me here to
preach. I don't miss church
fights & board meetings, but I
do miss preaching. It keeps
me in touch w scripture.

There's a story told about
Stevie Wonder meeting Tiger
Woods at a celebrity party.
Wonder mentioned that he was
an excellent golfer. Tiger was a
bit skeptical that the blind
musician could play excellent
golf but he was too polite to
say anything. "When I tee off,"
Stevie explained, "I have a
guy call to me from the green."

My ~~sharp~~ sharp sense of hearing lets me aim. Tiger was impressed and Steve suggested they play a round. When Tiger agreed, Steve asked "How about we play for \$100,000?" Tiger insisted he would not play for money, but Steve argued until Tiger relented and said, "So, when do you want to play?" Steve laughed and replied, "I'll play any night you choose."

Attitude! I have had a visual problem all my life and it got worse when I was in my 30's leading to a split down the center of my retina. ~~Then~~ I had a cataracts on ~~that~~ ^{the} eye — so I was virtually going blind until my doctor did a miraculous operation on one eye that gave me nearly perfect vision in that eye. But years ago when I was Pastoring at Providence R.I.

my associate pastor, who was a young man $\bar{c}$ leukemia whose chemotherapy had left him blind, Rev. Michael Nordstrom, called me all excited one night & said -
Merge - we can drive - they've
brailed the roads."

Attitude. Our psalm for the day says "Happy are those whose help & hope is in God, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. God sets the prisoner free & opens the eyes of the blind. God lifts up those who are bowed down; & loves the righteous. God watches over the sojourners, and upholds the widow & orphans; but God brings the ways of the wicked to ruin. God will reign forever - from generation to generation."

That's the God the Syrophoenician
woman believed in.

Attitude + faith can make a huge difference in your life.

Today, Jesus is trying to reach every human being to tell them they are loved. The Syrophenician woman stands for all those who are outside looking in and wondering if Jesus really means them.

From antiquity the Jews anticipated the Messiah who would be born a Jew. The prophets foretold it + their literature declared his coming.

1. Why God would choose a small, rebellious, itinerant band of people to be the nation the Savior would come to is a question only God could answer, but God did. Maybe God realized they needed all the help they could get.

Why God would choose a young teenager, barely out of puberty to be the avenue of incarnation for the Savior is a question only God can answer, ~~maybe~~ but God did. Maybe God saw an obedient heart.

Why God would choose a small, insignificant + dirty town like Bethlehem for the birth of the Savior is a question only God can answer, but God did. Maybe God knew that since Bethlehem means "house of bread" God knew we would need the bread of life.

The Jews were always fussing @ God, but God loved them unconditionally.

In Just Like Jesus, May Lucado writes "If you think his love for you would be stronger if your faith were, you're wrong."

If you think ~~this~~ ^{Jesus} love would be deeper if your thoughts were, you're wrong again. Don't confuse God's love - the love of people. The love of people often increases - performance - & decreases - mistakes. Not so - God. God loves you where you are - but - remembers always God loves you too much to leave you where you are. God wants to love you to wholeness. That was the reason Jesus came - That was the message the people then - and now - needed to hear, how often Israel had spurned God's love. How often they rejected God's message. How desperately they - and we - attempted to earn God's love by making & worshipping the laws of religion - thinking they were worshipping God. They, too, needed to hear the words "God so loved the world that God sent Jesus - That whosoever will may be saved."

The incident of the Syrophenician woman is a demon-possessed daughter has much more meaning than just a simple healing.

Previously Jesus dealt with the distinction between foods that were clean + unclean. Jews would never soil their lives by coming into contact with a Gentile they knew was ritually unclean. Wm. Barclay observes "It may well be that Jesus is saying by implication that the Gentiles - their unclean people - too have their place in the D & G."

Today Jesus reminds us that anyone who asks for help will receive it - even a fresh-mouthed Syrophenician woman. The woman came asking Jesus help for her daughter, His answer was that it was not right to take the children's bread & throw it to the dogs. That sounds shocking coming

from the mouth of Jesus..

The dog was not the well-loved guardian that it is today - most commonly it was a term of dishonor or rebuke. Male temple prostitutes were called dogs. "Thou shalt not bring the hire of a dog or the wages of a prostitute to pay any vow in the temple" - was directed at the male ^{female} temple prostitutes of ancient canaan.

To the Greeks, the word dog meant a shameless & audacious woman; it was used with exactly the connotation that we use the word "bitch" today. To the Jew it was equally a term of contempt. "Do not give dogs that which is holy." And it was a term used for the Gentiles. The Pharisee's prayer was "I thank God that you have not made me a woman,

a gentle or a dog." It was an insult but Jesus took the sting out of it. He didn't use the usual word for dog - he used a diminutive word which described not the wild dogs of the street, but the little pet lap-dogs of the house. In Greek, diminutives are characteristically affectionate.

Without a doubt Jesus tone of voice made all the difference. Some one can call you "dyke" and it is an insult. Others can call you dyke & it means you're a strong woman. The same word can be a deadly insult or an affectionate address - according to the tone of voice. We can call each other affectionate names we would never allow an outsider to use.

Jesus did not shut the door. First he said the children of Israel

must be fed. but there ~~was~~ ^{was} plenty to be shared. The woman was a Greek - good & ~~was~~ ^{was}. She had a healthy attitude. She did not take umbrage but saw at once that Jesus was speaking & a smile. ~~Kitchen~~ Forks hadn't been invented. People ate from a common bowl using bread as a scoop. Often they wiped their hands on chunks of bread & fed the bread to children or their pets. So she said "I know the children are fed first, but can't I even get the scraps the children throw away?" And Jesus loved it. Here was an attitude that would not take no for an answer. Here was a woman & the tragedy of an ill child at home and there was still a faintly attitude that in her answer Jesus' retort & one of her own. Her faith was tested & her faith was real and her prayer was answered.

Symbolically, she stands for all the outsiders who so eagerly seized on the bread of heaven - others threw away. In many ways, she stands for us.

Are you standing outside - or do you know someone who is standing outside - yearning for the bread of life. Let them know - and you know - that Jesus is willing to feed us all the bread of life.

Don't take a defeatist attitude claim what's yours. This acca was woman did. You can too.
Amen.

Two Questions We All Ask

An eminent psychologist was called to testify in court. He was a pompous man and sat down in the witness chair unaware that its rear legs were set precariously on the back of the raised platform.

"Will you please state your name?" asked the district attorney.

Sitting back in his chair, the psychologist opened his mouth to answer, but instead catapulted head-over-heels backward and landed in a stack of exhibits and recording equipment.

Everyone watched in stunned silence as he extricated himself, rearranged his vest & tie and was reseated on the witness stand. The glare he directed at onlookers dared anyone to so much as smirk.

"Well, doctor" continued the D.A. without changing expression, "perhaps we could start with an easier question!"

A snake comes to Eve + asks
"do you want to be wise - loved
you like to know all that God
knows"

A wealthy young man comes
to Jesus and asks "What must
I do to get into heaven."

One comes from a fable -
one comes from a frightened
young man.

One is asked of WOMAN as a
fact. The other is asked of
JESUS - maybe as a test.

Fables are interesting things.
When we were children most
of us read talking animal
stories - Aesop's fables -
Uncle Remus. Even the
ancient world told fables.

Here's one from just above
the time Genesis was added
to our bibles - and please
don't think Genesis was the

first book written - it wasn't
It was written - as good prologues
are - after almost all of the
book was written to fill everyone
in on what had gone before.
Of course it was based on tales
& legends which had been told
around the supper table & the
fire ring for many centuries but
it didn't become the first book
until David's time something about
800 years before X. The stories
stretch out to almost time beyond
memory - when the only memories
are stories & songs from our common
ancestors -

Tables -

A fox looked up into a tree & saw
a crow sitting on the utmost
branch. The crow looked rightly
appetizing to him, for he was very
hungry. He tried every wile to get
him down, but the old crow
only leered contemptuously down
at him. "Foolish crow" the fox
said banteringly, "believe me,

you have nothing to fear from me.
Don't ~~te~~ you know that the birds
and beasts will never have to
fight again? Haven't you heard
the Messiah is coming? If you
were a trained Talmud scholar
like me, you'd surely know that
the prophet Isaiah has said that
when Messiah comes "the lion
shall lie down $\bar{c}$ the lamb + the
fox $\bar{c}$ the crow, + there shall be
peace forevermore.

As he stood there speaking
sweetly, the baying of hounds
was heard. The fox began to
tremble $\bar{c}$ fright.

"Foolish fox" croaked the crow
pleasantly from the tree. "You
have no reason to be afraid,
since you're a Talmud scholar
and know what the prophet
Isaiah has said."

"True, I know what the prophet
Isaiah said," cried the fox as he
~~shunk~~ slunk off into the bushes.
"but the trouble is the dogs don't."

When I took Intro. to Philosophy I learned that the ancient philosophers asked - among others - these questions. "What is the good life?" and "What is a good death." Eternal kinds of questions very much like the snake tempting Eve - wisdom + the young man's taunting question to Jesus.

The Adam + Eve story always makes me angry. So much has been mis-taught about it. I guess blaming women is such a heterosexual game. Straight guys don't have to take responsibility for their actions. "The Devil made me do it" just doesn't wash for me. My Dad was a preacher and one of the things he taught us was that "Satan has only as much power as we are willing to give him."

Unfortunately - you don't learn

that in S.S. - a good friend
of mine Betsy Hines, a Methodist
minister - a classmate in ~~the~~ my
Masters of Theology program said
once "The Amer. SS is the greatest
detriment to faith that the church
knows."

What did we learn in SS.

1. Adam + Eve's sin had something
to do with sex: (and therefore
all sin is sexual)
2. The idea that Adam's sin was
transferred to all his descendants
thru inheritance, that is, thru
the act of procreation.
3. There was no sexual activity
in Eden - they only caught on
after they'd eaten the apple.
4. Woman had a greater ~~respons~~ respons
ibility for the fall than man.
5. If you were a Catholic - that
the monastic life of celibacy
is a higher ideal than marriage
(with a lot of help here from
St Paul - in 1 cor 7: 9 - "it is

- better to marry Than to burn"
- in the restrictions of priesthood or ministry to men.
 - in the anethematizing of birth control - as if sex were not to be enjoyed unless children resulted (and that affects us too)

In the sharply divergent standards of fidelity expected of the two sexes, as if women by their nature had to be kept on a tighter rein than men — and so on.

Adam blames Eve & Eve blames the serpent and it's all a merry-go-round. But stop the music - and let's get off & really look at it.

What did the serpent offer Eve? Wisdom. It's almost Halloween. The figure of the Crone was an awesome one in the ancient world. She knew the spells &

incantations. She could make magic & affect the course of love, sex, & history. Women authored men in the ancient world by many means. War, hunting, bride stealing - all took their toll of men. Diseases, wounds, infections took down men at an early age.

Childbirth took down many women - but if a woman survived childbirth she could live into her postmenopausal years & women who did were looked to for wisdom. They knew the tales of the tribe. Reading or not - our two oldest pieces of scripture Miriam's song after the Red Sea crossing & Deborah's song in Judges bear this out. Women were the original story tellers around the fire.

Eve wanted wisdom. She wanted what only God had. Total wisdom. She wanted to be as wise & God. And

her sin was curious. How many times when something tragic has happened have we stood there and asked "Why?" And realized only God had that answer. Eve wanted that knowledge - she may have gotten it, but she also got evil + pain + death. None of which the serpent offered. Eve stands to get her share of the blame, but blame her for the right thing -

Adam is another story. More often the greatest sin is in not saying "No." Sadly Adam could have said "No." How many times in our lives have we found ourselves in deep trouble all because we should have said No + didn't + went ahead + did something we knew was wrong.

Remember when you were a kid and your answer when you got caught was "Jimmy made me do it." + your mom said "It

Johnny told you to jump off a cliff would you?

Let's quickly switch to the second question "What must I do to get into heaven?" It's a ~~flawed~~ flawed question. There is nothing we can do to guarantee that we will get into heaven. Entry into heaven is not determined by what we do - but by what X has done for us. All we can do is receive what has already been granted. If you think you earned frequent flyer points for heaven by being in worship today, you're mistaken. If you think that putting a fat check in the offering plate will get you through the pearly gates, you're in for a surprise - although I'm sure Sandy would love for you to try it. Heaven is a matter of being - not doing. If you think giving up your homosexuality will guarantee you a place in heaven

Get over it. If X has come into your life & is renewing your life daily - you are already living in the D of G & there's nothing you need to do.

Good teacher - what must I do to inherit eternal life. And Jesus answers "Don't kill, Don't commit adultery, "Don't steal" don't cheat - honor your parents.

"I've done all That!" What else.

"Sell all you have & give to the poor & you shall have treasure in heaven. And come follow me.

We center on the money thing - that's not what Jesus was saying. It was LEAVE IT ALL & FOLLOW ME!

The trouble is we want to hang on to all our old baggage - gold & bag. When Jesus tells us to sell it all - leave it all & come

follow him.

Maxhucado once wrote "God does not save us because of what we have done. Only a puny God could be bought & our fetters. Only an egotistical God would be impressed & our pain. Only a temperamental God could be satisfied by our sacrifices. Only a heartless God would sell salvation to the highest bidder. Only a great God does for God's people what they cannot do for themselves.

The rich young ruler's wealth could not buy him a place at the table of God - but the fungus was already spread. All he had to do was take & eat.

Our is a loving God, who demands nothing more & nothing less than that you leave it all & follow. ~~him~~ Whatever ties you to old habits, old ways of thinking, old dependencies

leave them now + follow the X.
The table is set - you only have
to come + feast.

Amen.

Praise
and
Glory
To
Our
God
for
Ever
and
Ever



Monthly Financial Report

<u>Date</u>	<u>Attendance</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Offering</u>
10/01/00	31	\$680.31	\$662.00
10/08/00	30	680.31	396.00
10/15/00	32	680.31	520.00
10/22/00	20	680.31	1,108.00

Announcements

The Twelve Graceful Steps Group – This is a Christ Centered 12 Step support group where all are welcome. Meeting is on Friday 6:15, see Marty or Susan for more information.

GLAD District Conference is November 17 – 19 in Winston- Salem.

Craft sale and auction at MCCA on Saturday Nov. 4th at 1-3pm.

Catholic Diocese retreat for gay and lesbian Christians on Friday Nov. 3rd at the Parrish Hall of All Souls Episcopal Church at 6:00pm. Dinner is a \$10.00 donation. Please let Sandi know if you plan to attend.

GRACE FELLOWSHIP MCC

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Directors	Kelly Foster, Treasurer	696-8815
	Joy Williams, Clerk	697-7426
	Becky Franz-Paul, Member at Large	697-9042